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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

USING THE MEDICINE WHEEL FOR DISCUSSING ABORIGINAL ISSUES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

By

Corinne Ament Sperling

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Education

Department of Secondary Education

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Using the Medicine Wheel to Address Aboriginal Issues in the Social Studies Classroom* submitted by Corinne Ament Sperling in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Social Studies 10 students using the medicine wheel as a holistic learning tool in examining issues of importance to Aboriginal people. I hoped to increase students' awareness and sensitivity to Aboriginal peoples' culture, history and contemporary existence. As well, it was my goal to engage students to move towards social justice for Aboriginal people.

Three classes of grade 10 Social Studies students were the participants in the study. These students studied the cultures and histories of Aboriginal people and discussed contemporary issues affecting Aboriginal communities over a two and half month period. During this time students participated in large group discussions, personal reflections and a questionnaire. Group discussions were semi-structured in nature.

Five themes relating to students' experiences using the medicine wheel emerged from the data. Most students in the study found new understandings and compassion for Aboriginal people, while some students resisted any new understandings.

This study also reinforces the value of critical pedagogy and anti-racism education in the social studies classroom with its aims to deconstruct stereotypes of Aboriginal people and to emancipate both the participant and the subject from hegemonic social structures which work to constrain them in an unjust social system.

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CHAPTER ONE

IN THE BEGINNING

After ten years of teaching senior high school social studies, primarily in urban high schools with multicultural populations, I have become keenly aware of the need to address current, relevant issues in the lives of young people. It is my personal belief that all of my students should have the tools to reflect on their personal values and beliefs in the context of discussing contemporary problems or situations. As members of a rapidly changing society, interpretive and analytic skills are crucial to their ability to address issues of change in their lives. Consequently, I had decided that the political, economic, and social implications of the events occurring in Burnt Church, New Brunswick in the autumn of 2000 made both appropriate curricular connections to grade ten social studies, and my objective of addressing current events easier to facilitate. The ensuing fight over fishing rights between Mik'maq fisherman, non-Native fisherman and the department of fisheries and oceans made front page news. Violent scenes of angry fishermen shooting at one another and ripping traps out of the water, leaving communities in a state of unrest, seemed reflective of previous issues affecting both the Lubicon Indians of British Columbia against logging companies on their lands and of the Mowhawk Indians of Oka, Quebec fighting against the expansion of a golf course onto their sacred burial grounds. I had decided, while watching the daily events unfold on the evening news, this important, emotionally and politically charged issue must be critically analyzed in my Social Studies 10 classes. Furthermore, I reflected, sensationalist media coverage often

leaves these issues not addressed in a complete, complex fashion. Any students who had caught these news clips, or had seen the cover of the newspaper, would have been exposed to the struggle, but perhaps not the political, social and historical reasons behind it. I felt it was my responsibility to bring these issues to the classroom. An analysis of the events in Burnt Church would serve as an excellent opportunity to further discuss the greater issues affecting Aboriginal communities, such as treaty rights. So, armed with clear objectives, enthusiasm, an organized and detailed lesson plan, plenty of resources and a clear understanding of the issues, I was ready for class.

That day, after my introduction, students began the student-centered activity in small groups, which allowed each student the opportunity to discuss the issues and concerns from various assumed subject positions: Mik'maq fishermen, non-Native fisherman, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Eager to hear what each student had to say, I began circulating amongst the groups, listening intently and adding my comments to the discussions. I had encountered apathy from some students, who evidently did not care about or see the relevance of First Nations peoples' treaty rights. "Why should they be treated any differently than other Canadians?" one student commented, "all they ever want is free stuff anyway." "Yeah," commented another student, "damn wagon burners." I was shocked at both the inappropriateness of the comment and how freely it was used, and I was made aware of the need for a thorough discussion of the principle of fairness. Although I was greatly troubled by these comments, I was careful not to overreact and "blow up" at the students and awkwardly bring the various class conversations to an

end. Besides, such a situation requires a more thoughtful and tactful approach in working towards an understanding of its painful ramifications for others, including myself and a Metis student in the class, who at this point, may or may not have heard the comment. I decided to quietly, but sternly, remind the students not to use inappropriate and disrespectful language and to try their best to put themselves in the position of the other. Another student had commented on the appalling conditions of many reserves based on her experience of having lived among a largely Aboriginal population: "[The reserves] are like that," she said, "because they waste their money that they get from the government on alcohol, drugs and big trucks, and then they go out and trash them, usually within a week." Since I felt that I could not casually dismiss her personal experience and understanding, I was then put in what I felt was a very awkward place. Many students, quick to side with what seemed a convenient stereotype, agreed with her viewpoint, and the class discussion quickly went from a discussion of aboriginal fishing rights to a dismissal of Aboriginal people and their concerns altogether. I addressed the class with a plea to understand the experience of the other and to recognize that we must all play in role in working towards settlements that meet the needs of all concerned groups. "The purpose of this activity was for you to experience the difficulties in negotiations, which you have clearly demonstrated. Each party has its distinct concerns regarding the issues of fairness, equality and compromise." I stated. Throughout the class discussion, I hoped for the tone to change, to lessen the impact of such stereotypic and painful comments, particularly for my Metis student who was quiet, but seemingly unaffected.

After the class had ended, I was hurt, angry and disappointed. What was it that had brought out these emotions in me? I certainly had not expected, nor was I prepared for, such a negative reaction from my students. Compassion for, and understanding of, Aboriginal people was not evident in our class discussion. It was obvious my students were not adequately prepared for this activity. In asking students to use the knowledge they had of Canada's Aboriginal peoples and to be sympathetic and understanding to the existing situation of Aboriginal people, I had failed. Stereotyping unfortunately had replaced any real understanding of the culture and people for these students. Where then had I failed my students? What could I have done better or differently? How could I best meet the needs of my students with the hope of helping students to be sensitive to cultural issues and people? How could I help them to understand and sympathize with the plight of our Aboriginal people? These questions sat with me uncomfortably.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

As a social studies teacher, I encounter many relevant news items and experiences to share with my students. Interesting local, national or international news almost always has a way of working itself into my lesson planning. A well thought-out lesson plan for the class enables me to run the class as smoothly as possible; however, it is still impossible to plan for every possible contingent event. In planning for this class, I had realized the necessity for as much guidance and structure as possible, as this class tended to be quite social and could quite easily get "off task."

However, I certainly did not want to simply choose the easier alternative--denying them opportunities for cooperative learning. Often, it is these socially active classes which benefit from interactive activities. Therefore, my lesson plan would have to include specific questions regarding the various viewpoints presented in the articles- to help stimulate discussions. Extra resource materials--newspaper and magazine articles would be provided, and timed groups discussion with clear aims would help keep students accountable for their work. All of this forethought and planning was designed at bringing about the desired results. In retrospect, the plan was successful in beginning conversations, allowing for all voices to be heard. However, the plan in no way left me prepared for the variety of emotional responses which surfaced from those voices, ranging from apathy to anger, each emotional response reflective of individual experiences. This situation had posed a great challenge.

"What makes true reflection in action difficult is that life in the classroom is contingent, dynamic, ever-changing" (van Manen, 1995, p.40). Reflecting on my autobiographical experience, it is evident that various situations warranted acting on the spot. While inappropriate comments are not necessarily uncommon in the classroom, culturally insensitive comments made in a protective classroom environment have the potential to emotionally damage students in the class. My personal response not to severely reprimand the student for this comment may have been viewed by other students as a dismissal of the action, that I did not consider it to be very grave. However, my proximity to the situation brought out different results. In the midst of group activity, where students were engaged in conversation, I thought

it was best not to completely disrupt the focus of the class at that point, rather to finish up the activity in order to later address individual concerns in an open respectful forum. While I was able to maintain the focus of the class and complete the activity, I, personally, was having great difficulty dealing with the overall negative tone. Perhaps this was the most difficult aspect of the experience--the negative feelings of students towards Aboriginal people. This was compounded by my own personal feelings of helplessness in the face of this contempt. Sensitive issues of racism or stereotyping are rarely dealt with on the spot or eradicated overnight.

There were certainly many troubling moments in this class: the lack of concern (shown by some students) of Aboriginal issues and the stereotyping of Aboriginal people.

After school, I discussed my situation with colleagues who were equally dismayed at the events in my classroom, but were very supportive of my overall objectives--to engage students in discussion of timely controversial issues, particularly those dealing with the concerns of Aboriginal people. However, one teacher had noted that in addressing such matters, one should always expect challenges or contingent events.

Therefore, my concern for the preservation and respect of Aboriginal cultures and people has brought me to this qualitative study; my aim is to use a holistic teaching methodology which will more effectively address critical issues affecting Aboriginal cultures and people. It is my challenge to create an open and compassionate classroom environment where students can freely discuss social issues

while demonstrating respect and concern for the "other." Students may be unaware of their prejudices or biases—so, when addressing controversial or contentious issues in the classroom, these may be brought to light. It is important that students feel that they have a voice to be heard, but not at the risk of silencing others. Therefore, it becomes essential to create an atmosphere that allows for students to be open and truthful, yet while showing respect for others and challenging the validity of stereotypes and racism. It is important that these issues be considered and reconsidered in order to benefit from insights. "The 'I' always has one responsibility more than all the others" (Levinas, 1985, p.99). Consequently, my responsibility as a teacher is for the other, which makes it appropriate to take on some responsibility to bring these challenging issues into the classroom in appropriate ways for the benefit of my students, myself and Aboriginal communities.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

THE CIRCLE BEGINS

The logical starting point for investigating the effectiveness of students' responses to new approaches to challenging stereotypes and building new understandings of Aboriginal people is in anti-racism education and critical theory. These theories are rooted in a belief in the necessity of providing a voice for the marginalized in society by first combating inequality in schools, a micro-reflection of society, then in school curriculum. These inequalities are historically based on race, sexual identity, class and gender. Michael Apple (1999) writes about curriculum, which he believes is organized in and evaluated in a political way, and presents the idea of the existence of an "official knowledge" against which all other values, cultures and knowledge are compared. Peter McLaren (1989) examines curriculum and the way it benefits dominant groups and excludes subordinate ones. The marginalized are those who have been rendered silent by our education system which has perpetuated the dominant discourse of Eurocentrism and has for the most part, excluded the voices of others. Within the context of schools, anti-racism education and critical pedagogy are seen as not only taking responsibility for finding a place for minorities to express themselves, but also for being proactive in promoting necessary social change and racial justice. Before this can happen, however, schools must first recognize how they may be complicit in promoting the marginalization of others, through both their overt and hidden curricula that are designed to keep the dominant

group in power. As well, teachers must take responsibility in locating their own personal histories through self-reflection. They must acknowledge and take responsibility for contributing, albeit inadvertently, to a racist and political agenda. Teachers who are committed to these anti-racist philosophies are therefore committed to making educational excellence possible for all students. It is within educational institutions, the foremost places to understand current practices, that social barriers can be identified and new approaches to our collective existence can be devised.

Critical pedagogues suggest that the structure of the school system is not advantageous to all, and is in fact an oppressive force to many. George Sefa Dei puts forth the idea that the school system has been historically successful in both "erasing students' collective and historical memories" (Dei, 1996, p.125) and marginalizing these students in a racialized and gendered society. These marginalized bodies are "continually silenced and rendered invisible through constant negation of multiple lived experiences and alternative knowledges" (Dei, 2000, p.11). This is what Paulo Freire (1990) calls the "culture of silence," whereby the victims of political, social and economic domination are kept "submerged" in a situation where critical awareness and response are practically impossible. The entire educational system is one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence.

Therefore, pedagogical methods to counter this negative force in the school system are not simple. Freire (1990) does note, however, that every human being, no matter how "ignorant "or submerged in the culture of silence he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogue with others, thus leaving some

hope for anti-racism educators. In giving a voice and power to the marginalized, Henry Giroux (2000) asks educators to raise questions about the centres and margins of power and to read history as a way of reclaiming power and to integrate the languages, knowledges, histories and experiences into the curriculum and the dynamics of everyday life. Likewise, Homi Bhabha (1994) posits that we articulate the absences of marginalized histories as narratives and read dominant narratives against themselves. We need to go beyond European and Canadian constructions of knowledge and teach the experiences and perspectives of diverse groups. Dei recognizes that it is within educational institutes, by using teaching methodologies that capture the experience that students bring to the school environment, that we will produce this much needed societal change and transformation.

In order for change to occur, there a few key commitments that schools and educators must make. It is critically important that teachers be self-reflective. Teachers are not neutral and teaching is a political act; teachers bring their personal values, perspectives and positions to the classroom. They must think critically and locate themselves in their own histories. This invitation will not be accepted readily, for, as Lacan, Felman (1987), Ellsworth (1997), McIsaac (2000) and Carson and Johnston (2000) note, "ignorance is a passion," that is to say, teachers will not want to believe that they are complicit in supporting a racist curriculum. The "real" in these messages can lead to feelings of anger, guilt or fear, which may lead to a further resistance of teachers, who are unprepared to accept that they are not who they "imagine" themselves to be: accepting of others, supporters of multiculturalism, and

certainly not racist. Some educators will not even recognize that what they see as a "normal" curriculum suited to all students is actually a "White," "Eurocentric" curriculum. Regardless, as Bhabha (1994) notes, the historical legacy of racism and how it has structured segregated experiences must be confronted. As well, Melanie Walker writes about the need of subaltern (Spivak, 1988) professionals to cross borders, cultures and dialects to have the courage to overcome social injustices. "Our aspiration will be not only to understand inequality but to act against it" (Walker, 1996, p.417).

SELF-EXPLORATION: READING THE WORLD

> *"I think we need to begin with the intersection between imperialism's legacy and education within our own lives" (Willinsky, 1998, p.13).*

As a Social Studies teacher and product of a Eurocentric education system, I have inevitably passed on to my students, through my teaching, and therefore perpetuated, many of the "White," "Western," "middle-class," hegemonic values present in the dominant narrative of education such as "strong work ethic," "independent critical thinking," "achievement and success" (as measured by formative and summative evaluations) and, of course, "proper classroom behaviour and good citizenship." Furthermore, while teaching about history, described by Leela Gandhi as the "discourse through which the West has asserted its hegemony over the world" (Gandhi, 1998, p.170), along with issues and topics relating to the nature and identity of Canada, I have been inadvertently responsible for perpetuating many

"cultural constructs of colonialism" (Pennycook, 1998, p.34). Giroux (2000) asks the question, "Whose future, story and interests does the school represent?" Critical pedagogues must recognize that as schools respond to diversity, they must recognize that 'different' is not the 'problem.' Different should not mean 'unequal' or 'incapable' (Dei, 1996, p.135). Teachers should openly challenge stereotypes and negotiate differences in positive ways by creating safe and secure spaces, allowing this response to diversity to happen. Giroux argues that schools need to be made into models of critical thinking, civic courage and active citizenship. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) puts forth the idea that anti-racism education is action-oriented and committed to social change, which are goals of this action research project. By taking an honest and careful look at school systems, curricula and themselves, educators can begin to, as Bhabha describes, deepen and expand the possibilities for critical agency, racial justice and democratic life. Freire encourages us, by claiming "man ... acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively" (Freire, 1990, p.167).

POSTCOLONIALISM IN THE CLASSROOM: CHALLENGING THE CURRICULUM

> *"We need to challenge the tragic images of mainstream television and textbooks"* (McCarthy and Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 116).

Sole reliance on textbooks is problematic, as "what counts as 'objective' knowledge in social studies textbooks, in fact, often represents a one-sided and theoretically distorted view of the subject under study" (Giroux & Penna, 1988, p.31).

My analysis of the core textbook for Alberta's Social Studies 10, called *Canada Today,* revealed a short (five page) and inadequate sub-section of Chapter 16 (the last chapter of the text - perhaps an afterthought) entitled: *Challenges and Opportunities: Now and in the Future*, called *First Nations and the World Today*. The chapter holds the promise of giving a current and rigorous representation of First Nations people and their issues and concerns; however, it fails to deliver. The sub-section, situated between an examination of Canada's international trade and a look at the world's AIDS epidemic under a section *World Diseases and Health*, is extremely telling about the hegemonic views of the "other" and where they belong, even when the "other" calls Canada home. This section of the chapter both generalizes and simplifies the problems faced by Indigenous people caused by colonization, in such statements as *"[t]heir lives were forever changed with the arrival of immigrants from other lands,"* (Smith et al., 1996, p.452) referring to "[w]ar, murder, strong drink, syphilis and other civilized diseases [as the] chief instruments of a destruction commonly couched under the euphemism 'contact with superior civilization'" (Hobson, in Pennycook, p.36). However,"[t]hey *share hopes for enjoying greater economic, social and political justice"* (Smith et al., 1996, p.452). It is important to note that Alastair Pennycook (1998) views such "stereotypes of colonialism as only the brutal opposition and economic exploitation of a people, [which] draw attention away from the constant cultural and micropolitical operation of colonialism" (Pennycook, 1998, p.24). Since the textbook chapter fails to consider the postcolonial reality of Aboriginal people by fixing them in their colonial past, it absolves the colonizer of any responsibility for

creating space and opportunity for the possibility of change in the present. It is in this and all representations of the "colonised other" by the "colonising self" which must be used to open the space for questioning. It is "for Bhabha the space where colonial subjects become agents of resistance and of change. It is the space within which Bhahba locates the condition of post-coloniality" (Bhabha in Slemon, 1994, p.24). Stephen Slemon, along with Bhabha, suggests that we seek out the difficulty in these "in-between spaces" by bringing in different perspectives and reading the dominant narrative against itself: "[b]y seeing the complexity of colonial relations, we are also more able to see the how colonialism is more closely linked to the complexities of current relationships" (Pennycook, 1998, p.29). This conviction is echoed by Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy who see the postcolonial as a:

> site of dialogic encounter that pushes us to examine center/periphery relations and conditions with specificity, wherever we can find them...Dialogue, in this sense, challenges us to rethink the discourses in which we operate and the languages we use to fashion the ethics of our professional lives. It asks us to look beyond our inherited way of thinking and acting, to new unexplored and perhaps even dangerous pedagogical practices (Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001, p.9).

One possibility in the examination of postcolonialism in Canada involves the use of dialogue to deconstruct the myths which support the discourses of colonialism, and, as Linda Hutcheon suggests, to construct different ones to take their place through the use of irony, which operates as a subversive force from within; "[i]rony, the trope that works from within a power field but still contests it, is a consistently useful strategy for post-colonial discourse" (Hutcheon, 1989, p.162). Therefore, in identifying the key events/myths which constitute the stages in the development of a

sovereign Canada, one thinks of the "long history of colonialism in Canada: from the *British* North America Act...to the very recent repatriation of the Constitution itself" (Hutcheon, 1989, p.158). It is these momentous historical events that have shaped the grand narratives of modern Canadian history and, of course, the celebrated end of colonial rule in Canada, with the signing of the 1982 Canada Act.

However, the *spaces between* these historic moments would be exemplified by the proposed changes to the Constitution, such as the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. These events provide opportunities for dialogue, challenging us to rethink the discourses, challenging us to read the narratives against themselves and to enable the colonised other to become agents of resistance and change. In his article, "Warrior as Pedagogue, Pedagogue as Warrior," Robert Regnier asks of us to see the "warrior" as an agent of change who acts "to reveal contradictions between dominant ideologies and aboriginal subjugation" and "to criticize racial injustice and enact the possibility of a reconstructed order" (Regnier, 1995, p.67). The political backdrop of the Meech Lake Accord is used to exemplify the actions of the "warrior," in this case, Elijah Harper, who alone prevented the approval of the accord in the Manitoba legislature because it did not adequately address the concerns of First Nations people. Acting from within, and against the dominant political structures of the "colonizer", Harper gives voice to First Nations people and their interests at the national level by exposing the truths about their marginalization and desire for sovereignty. The dialogue which emerges from these "in-between" spaces addresses the advancing of Aboriginal land claims, political self-determination, as well as the cultural, social and

economic survival of Aboriginal people. By pursuing these "in-between" spaces, educators reveal the condition of postcoloniality and open up the spaces for the marginalized, both in Canadian political agendas and in our curriculum goals, content and structure. While yet another possibility rests in the theories of Bhabha, that urges us to "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and...focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (Bhabha in McLeod, 2000, p.218). Bhabha encourages us to refuse to think of cultures as pure or holistic and to dismantle perceived notions of identity and subjectivity that depend on fixed binary definitions. This notion of "border lives" can be represented by the Metis people of Canada, particularly that of controversial historical icon Louis Riel who lived at the margin of different nations, "in-between contrary homelands." Riel, a Metis - - a term used to describe the hybridity of two cultural groups in Canada: European (French) and First Nations - - fought the coloniser over land and language rights for these "diasporic" people who were forging new identities in the North-West. Riel can be seen as an example of challenging the binary notions of "Us" and "Them", "Native" and "Foreigner," while he personally can be seen as crossing the borders, "full of contradiction and ambivalence" (McLeod, 2000, 217), as both a visionary and madman, a hero and victim. It is Linda Tuhiwai Smith who writes about the power of Indigenous communities who have worked to challenge "the legitimacy of the doctrines upon which colonial states have built their foundations" (Smith, 1999, p.111). It is this type of racist doctrine which has supported the constructed images of the Inferiority of the "Native other" and the

Superiority of the "Western/European Self" while "dispossess[ing] people of their land, culture, language, and history" (Pennycook, 1998, p.19).

Currently, the Canadian government is seeking to make amendments to the 1867 *Indian Act*, and it is the Assembly of First Nations who is challenging the legitimacy of the document which is reflective of the colonisers' continued control over the lives of First Nations people, whereby basic rights and governance are "gifts granted by the good graces of the government." However, "One does not modernize colonialism. One rejects it" (Coon Come in Lunman, 2002, pg. A6). It is important to note that the Canadian government does not derive its powers to govern Aboriginal people from the consent of Aboriginal people. The proposed *First Nations Governance Act* is being challenged by various First Nations and First Nations organizations on the grounds that it perpetuates much of what they seek to change, that is, continued governmental (colonial) control over Aboriginal people and their concerns. Meanwhile, the real possibility of a political model of Aboriginal self-government that acknowledges the collective rights of Aboriginal people to exercise jurisdiction over their legal, political, social and economic institutions exists (Van Dyke in Boldt and Long, 1984, p.553).

CANADA THE MULTICULTURAL

An understanding of multiculturalism in Canada is critical, as it is a widely debated definition, meaning very different things to different people. Some argue that Canadian multiculturalism has created a just society where all Canadians are equals,

as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Others believe that "multiculturalism in Canada has masked the discomforting racist practices and policies", and therefore allows most Canadians "the illusion that we live in a relatively non-racist society." (Bedard, 2000, p.50). Multiculturalism, as government policy, was created to solve issues of inequality. Yet, inequality continues to exist. However deceiving multiculturalism in Canada may be, it has become the reality for many Canadians. Michel Foucault refers to this type of phenomenon as the "power of truth" (Foucault in Ghosh, 1996, p.23), whereby there is the appearance that the sources of power are supportive of multiculturalism without having to relinquish any power. Official multiculturalism in Canada has allowed the dominant White population to experience a comfortable tolerance of the other, because they openly embrace cultural diversity without having to relinquish any power.

My own Social Studies 10 lessons have often revolved around such key concepts and ideas of Canadian multiculturalism, democracy and equality, which appear to be positive and innocuous topics and help to open up ways of uniting students together as to what it means to be Canadian. On the contrary, these terms are not as benign as I first thought and can be seen as highly problematic when viewed through the lens of the "other." Readings and interpretations of these ideas by the "other," Canada's Aboriginal people expose notions of alterity that are both exclusionary and homogenizing at the same time. For instance, Aboriginal people, collectively do not see themselves as part of the 'Canadian multiculture,' as the policy fails to recognize that they are the Canada's original inhabitants and not newcomers

or immigrants to Canada. They are, as deemed by the Hawthorn Report, "citizens plus," that is, they are full citizens, but they also possess special additional rights as charter members of the Canadian community (Cairns, 2000, p.162). Even the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, despite its acknowledgement of special rights for Aboriginal people, is problematic as it based around the western ideal of individual rights, which is "in conflict with Aboriginal philosophy, culture and organization of collective rights" (Boldt and Long, 1984, p.482). As such, Canadian democracy can also be interpreted as a subjugating notion for First Nations people whose desire and promise of sovereignty and self-determination remain part of governmental political rhetoric. All the while, Aboriginal people remain under on-going colonial rule and largely excluded from the dominant power structures: "The glamour of Canadian pluralism and healthy multi-ethnism is lessened when the obvious discussions about power, power relations and balances of power are neglected (Calliou, 1995, p.60).

THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

An examination of the history of how our education system has treated Aboriginal people reveals that not only were their needs clearly not met, they were aggressively crushed. The education system, as the vehicle of native assimilation in nineteenth-century Canada, aimed at socializing them with European, Christian and capitalist views in an attempt to shape them to the colonizers image (Perley, 1993, p.123). Over-crowded and disease ridden residential schools were designed as the agents of assimilation, which limited the contact native children had with their parents

and families, punished them for speaking their native languages and reinforced negative attitudes towards their own cultures: "In school we were taught that we were retarded. I believed I was dumb compared to white students and that I was low class, crude and dirty" (Adams, 2000, p.1). Indigenous knowledge has been under assault for many years: in residential schools, in other educational institutions, in the workplace, in social relations and in political forums. They have been pounded with the message that they know nothing and their culture is of no value: "From birth to death most Indians have been caught in a situation where they have had to listen to one unvarying and unceasing message- - that they are unacceptable as they are and that to become worthwhile as individuals they must change" (Cairns, 2000, p.50). Not only were there attempts to assimilate Aboriginal people into the Euro-Canadian way, but the history of Aboriginal people was denied and labeled as false. The attempted pressure on Aboriginal people to assimilate did not succeed; rather this indoctrination lead to their cultural deprivation and oppression. The result was an erasure of their stories, history and way of life. As Aboriginal knowledges were denounced, Aboriginal students were caught in the middle of a cultural transformation. They were no longer prepared for life of the reserves, nor did they feel a connection to, or acceptance by, Euro-Canadian culture. Not only do many Aboriginal people continue to experience intolerance, discrimination and racism by the non-native population, they have also remained socially and economically oppressed: "Disastrous educational practices and socio-economic policies for natives have resulted in poor education, unemployment, poverty, high crime rates,

alcoholism, substance abuse and suicide" (Ghosh, 1996, p.53). It is quite widely accepted that, as a result, Canada's Aboriginal peoples have historically suffered much damage to their culture and spirit.

BREAKING THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

Therefore, much effort on the part of critical educators is required to address the concerns of Aboriginal people. Teachers must be made aware of the destructive power of the White Eurocentric curriculum that has aimed at marginalizing Aboriginal people and that teachers have been instrumental in the perpetuation of a racist system: "White people do not have an awareness of themselves as standard bearers for the racist culture of mainstream society. It is taken for granted without any sensitivity...Instead the masses speak about racial minorities, multiculturalism and ethnic culture" (Adams, 2000, p.1). All students must learn to openly challenge Aboriginal stereotypes. Commonly, mainstream society continues to view First Nations people as victims, who need to be looked after by White people-- an image that is commonly reinforced by the media and television. In his article about the television show 'North of Sixty' entitled "North of Sixty, South of Accurate," Drew Hayden Taylor quotes Rodney Bobiwash, anti-racist consultant for the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto: "I don't believe anybody would watch [it] if it didn't perpetuate stereotypes about Indians. There seems to be a need to view Indians as downtrodden and oppressed" (Taylor, 1996, p.80). It is important that students are taught the necessary skills for challenging stereotypes by both critically analyzing the

message and issue presented in the stereotype, challenging its validity through a careful investigation of history and its background as well as understanding the painful ramifications of such misunderstandings. As well, teachers should regularly and carefully present alternative sources of positive and non-stereotyped information and images of Aboriginal people, such as Aboriginal-produced publications and media whose mandate is presenting an accurate message. Furthermore, when studying the cultures of First Nations, it is important not to focus solely on its representation by images from the past: "Museums and books attempt to preserve a dying culture and fail to recognize that aboriginal peoples and cultures have changed over time" (Bedard, 2000, p.52). Aboriginal cultures are not cemented in history; they have evolved and adapted to their new realities in spite of their past. It is important to be aware of their role in Canada, both past and present. It is also crucial to recognize that Aboriginal peoples of Canada have diverse histories and identities: "All native values and beliefs [as portrayed in American films] appear to be lumped together into a single homogeneous and consistent whole, regardless of actual variances and distinctions" (Churchill, 1992, p.236). Critical pedagogues need to be respectful of the differences between the various First Nations and not to render them indistinct by failing to acknowledge, whenever possible, the specific concerns to each First Nation. When applicable, common concerns can be referred to the Aboriginal people as a whole.

RECLAIMING POWER

Our Social Studies courses must integrate the languages, knowledge, experiences and histories of our Aboriginal people into the curriculum and dynamics of everyday life. To do so requires critical educators to go beyond the deconstruction of the dominant Euro-Canadian narrative and give expression to aboriginal philosophies, world views and social relations. Aboriginal people must be given the opportunity to identify and appreciate who they are, that is, to tell their story, and recognize the importance of their place in Canada and the world. Schools must "recognize and build upon the inter-relationships that exist among the spiritual, natural and human realms in the world, as reflected in Aboriginal cultural traditions and beliefs, as well as those of others, based on mutual respect and understanding" (Alaska website, 1998, paragraph 5), in designing and implementing learning material. There will be tremendous effort on behalf of the critical educator to give Aboriginal people the opportunity to reclaim power, as historically they were assumed to be unready for full citizenship by the state which argued that Aboriginal people were not capable of running their own affairs. They needed the government to take custody of them because it "knew what was best for them."

It is important to note that the primary curricular goal of Social Studies remains the promotion of good citizenship as characterized by those Canadians who actively participate in the maintenance of the status quo, politically, economically and socially. Marginalized Aboriginals, however, are not bound to the same notions of good citizenship, particularly so when its aims work against them. Certainly a

reinterpretation of the securely established belief in the existence of a "universalism" of citizenship is necessary. The entrenched myth that all Canadian citizens are equal provides the means for the colonizers' continued pursuit of hegemonic interests, while failing to recognize that, for reasons of economic, political and social dispossession, many Aboriginal people are unable to experience the same equality of citizenship that would enable their participation in current political discourse. Furthermore, their voice must be both heard and addressed, while acknowledging the "heterogeneity of the colonized body politic" (Spivak in Graves, 1998, paragraph 1); that is, not all Aboriginal people are a homogenous group sharing the same position and viewpoint with their "diaspora." As well, social barriers, such as poverty, racism, living conditions and lost generations to residential schools, have resulted in the devaluation of Aboriginal peoples. The school, in giving voice to Aboriginal concerns, thereby empowers students to begin to transform the existing reality affecting Aboriginal people by breaking down these social barriers.

NEW APPROACH TO A COLLECTIVE EXISTENCE

A successful critical education will allow for aboriginal knowledge to flourish and intercultural sharing to be practiced in a spirit of coexistence and mutual respect. As well, the recognition of the contemporary validity of much traditional Indigenous knowledge, values and beliefs will open up new ways of thinking about our world and offer us alternative methods of problem-solving. Educators need to ground students in learning principles and practices associated with traditional knowledge by creating

real world contexts in which students are situated, for instance, present day concerns over land claims and treaty rights, while also recognizing how and why Aboriginal culture has changed over time. Students must be given the tools of knowledge to anticipate the changes that occur when different cultural systems come into contact with one another, as well as how cultural beliefs and values will influence the interactions of people from different backgrounds (Alaska website, 1998, paragraph 5). These critical thinking skills will enable them to participate fully, as active citizens in community development, political relations, and social justice.

It is appropriate to explore the possibility of an Aboriginal holistic approach to learning which is interested in "reclaiming the soul," encourages "thoughtful living with others" (Aoki, 1991, p.21), and emphasizes compassion, social justice and thoughtful living with others. The integration of an Aboriginal epistemology allows for the possibility of holistic learning that focuses on the relations between student and teacher, student and community, and student and world: "Think about being related to all things!" (McGaa,1990, p.209). Teachers who are willing to take on the challenge of a holistic curriculum have established an open caring environment which values human life, recognizes the imaginative and creative aspects of people and aims at the common good, that is, creating just relations within the classroom and society. Elder Louis Sunchild says this about learning and teaching:

> Learning is not a product of transferring information between a teacher and a student. It is a product of creation and re-creation, in a mutual relationship of personal interaction, of information. It is not just cognitive (mental act), but an emotional--thus physical--act. Learning is felt. It is a sensation. It is something that involves emotions...Learning is essentially a spiritual thing,

> because the compassionate mind is one that is spiritually centered. (Sunchild in Lightning, 1992, p.232).

The holistic well-being of young people is possible through a life in harmony and balance fostered by developing the following values in students: modesty, leadership, generosity, integrity, wisdom, courage, compassion for others, respect for Elders and living harmoniously with the environment (Assembly of First Nations, in Hanohano, 1999, p.218). In striving towards wholeness, connectedness and balance, there is a recognition that "teaching the mind alone [does] not constitute education and that students [can]not be educated without addressing their emotional and spiritual beings" (Regnier, 1995, p.313). Spiritual knowledge for Aboriginal people is an embodied knowledge and is seen as the key to education for meaning. While most curricula places value in the ability for independent thinking and acting, a comprehensive holistic curriculum sees "a knowledgeable human being as one who is sensitive to others and to his/her surroundings" (Beck & Walters, in Ermine, 1977, p.164). Thus, to be educated is to "walk with others in life's ventures" (Aoki, 1991, p.21). Total learning is possible through the development of emotional, spiritual, physical and mental qualities in students and is critical to inspire students to strive towards liberation and justice for others. Through dialogue with students and the use of holistic tools such as the medicine wheel, teachers are able to responsibly discuss difficult, complex and interconnected issues, such as racism and the economic and social marginalization of minorities.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL AS A TOOL FOR HOLISTIC LEARNING

> *"As the medicine wheel intertwines all life, we also intertwine all aspects of life into one, making our core belief spirituality, and do not see our lives as being set out in compartments. The hub of the circle or the medicine wheel is the beginning and is used by my people as a heuristic tool that resembles the earth and contains all human knowledge, reaching out to all life forms"* (English, 1996, p.97).

The use of the medicine wheel as a tool for holistic approach to learning provides the opportunity for new possibilities within Social Studies classroom discussions about Aboriginal culture, people and issues. The medicine wheel as a holistic pedagogical tool will allow the teacher to meet the challenges and opportunities of holistic education by openly challenging stereotypes and misunderstandings, while focusing on the distinct and positive identities of Aboriginal people. The use of the medicine wheel enables students to go beyond dominant accounts and give expression to aboriginal philosophies, world views and social relations, while practicing inter-cultural sharing and critical thinking. Vicki English states: " It is a challenge to create and develop a curriculum of holistic value which should be a flexible modification of...stories of the past, and blend it with what is happening in the child's world of today" (English, 1996. p.100). This sentiment is echoed by Purpel who states that we should make every effort to make knowledge meaningful to students by linking it to the stories and experiences that give meaning to students' lives (Purpel, 1989, p.150). The medicine wheel allows the opportunity to integrate the languages, histories, issues and experiences of Aboriginal people into the dynamics of everyday life. The medicine wheel creates the opening for

meaningful social inquiry which values the experiences, values and beliefs that students bring to school while allowing for open-ended reflective questions for which there is no absolute.

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

The medicine wheel, as practiced by the Plains Nations people, symbolizes a way of life in harmony with and between the physical, emotional and spiritual world. It reflects the holistic character of aboriginal knowledge and lived experiences: "The medicine wheel is one of the most powerful instruments used to convey the holistic character of aboriginal knowledge and experience" (Castellano, 2000, p.29). The circle is divided into four sections, each representing one of the directions: East, West, South and North. Each direction corresponds to the themes: four groups of people, four aspects of human life, four seasons, four generations, four educational concepts and four tricksters whose purpose is to teach morals and values. The circle will serve as a instrument for teaching, learning and reflecting about human history, present and past, and its impact. Sharilyn Calliou (1996) reinforces the idea of the use of the medicine wheel for its holistic approach to learning, rather than solely using a cognitive approach, in trying to understand the complexity, continuity and interconnectedness of issues and events. In other words, we must give as much opportunity to also incorporate the physical, the emotional and the spiritual. The four directions, educational concepts and aspects of human life will be our guiding principles as students move around the circle.

The North is representative of "mind" and "interpretation," where students will be asked to use critical thinking skills in order to clarify the problem to be solved in the issue or event being discussed. Students will address any assumptions and stereotypes that may arise. In the East, we encounter "emotion" and "knowledge", where students must work with background information and additional evidence; in other words, what they have to learn and what they already know. Here students must determine which evidence is factual. An awareness of this truth or fact may bring about some emotional responses as narratives are told. It is also important to note that the Aboriginal perception of truth is subjective, because "Aboriginal knowledge is rooted in personal experience and lays no claim to universality" (Castellano, 2000, p.25). As well, seeking "knowledge" requires that students question what possible "gains or losses" and "costs and benefits" are involved. In the South, we have "physical" and "relationship," whereby students must determine the differing viewpoints involved and from where they come. Some questions asked are: "Whose interests are being served?," "How is power involved?", "How are race, gender and income involved?". Teachers must be sure to speak about the relevance of negotiations and compromises. Lastly, careful consideration and contemplation are asked of students in the West, where the "spiritual" and "reflection" aspects lie. Lastly, students are asked to make personal reflections on the situation, taking into account their values and beliefs, when determining a possible solution in which best meets the needs of the involved groups. As this is a very personal aspect, where students are asked to use their convictions as guiding principles in deciding which

alternative is the most harmonious, it should incorporate our desire for a social justice and for the greater good. The reflection can take the form of a personal written response, a graphic representation or a narrative[1]. Mezirow (1991) writes about critical reflection as opening the possibility of transforming meaning and "becoming more aware of why we perceive, think, feel, or act as we do" (Mezirow in Kember et al., 1996, p. 332).

[1]Sleeter writes: "[Reflective] writing allows students to define issues, express feelings, and develop descriptive texts for analysis." Students can use the journal writing as an opportunity to relate concepts or insights from the class to examples or incidents in their own lives.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRESENT STUDY

PURPOSE

My aim in developing this study was for students to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of Canada's Aboriginal peoples and an awareness of the issues that affect their cultures, identities and communities. I hoped to gain insight into Social Studies 10 students' experiences of using the medicine wheel as a holistic learning tool for understanding issues of importance to Aboriginal people.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As the Aboriginal population of Canada continues to grow rapidly, the need becomes even greater for citizens who are well informed about the issues affecting the identities and cultures of Aboriginal people. While it is the "Aboriginal people [that] have suffered the most severe social, economic, and educational problems in Canada," (Regnier, 1995, p.319), we must all work towards solutions.

The current cultural, political and economic realities of Aboriginal people affect all Canadians. Consequently, deconstructing the stereotypes and addressing the racism facing Aboriginal people, within a safe and open classroom environment, as well as promoting empathy for the "other," were the goals of this action research project: "Curricula and instruction must consider the sensibility of unconditional love/respect and compassion required for sustainable peacemaking for ourselves and our children in classrooms and other communities. For it is our children who will

inherit the future we teach" (Calliou, 1995, p.71). My research is based on the belief that the use of the medicine wheel as a holistic learning tool will help students gain an appreciation for Aboriginal beliefs and ways of knowing, as well as foster a better understanding of Aboriginal people in Canada. The medicine wheel can be a pedagogical tool for teaching, learning and understanding (English, 1996; Hanohano, 2001; Calliou, 1995; Regnier, 1995). This study explored and documented students' experiences in using this holistic model for structuring classroom discussions about curricular Aboriginal issues such as treaties and treaty rights, self-governance, the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism, stereotyping and racism. In this research project, student participants were given the opportunity to do inquiries of critical and current issues, such as land claims disputes (as brought to life with the Oka standoff), fishing rights (using Burnt Church as the case study) and residential schools abuse claims. A holistic understanding of all of the factors affecting the aforementioned issues was aided by the use of the medicine wheel and its understandings of all facets of human beings (emotional, mental, physical and spiritual) as well as the related educational concepts (knowledge, relationship, reflection and interpretation) (see Appendix F). I was also interested in researching how the medicine wheel would aid in generating classroom discussions with balanced perspectives. It was also hoped that the medicine wheel would also help to foster respect for and interest in Aboriginal people and their values. Lastly, I was interested in how student participants experienced the interconnectedness of the issues studied.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the research project:

- How do students experience the use of the medicine wheel in discussing issues of importance to First Nations communities?
- Is the medicine wheel an appropriate tool for addressing issues of a sensitive nature to non-Aboriginal students?
- Does the medicine wheel contribute to the creation of an open and safe classroom climate?

DEFINITIONS

My research was grounded in theories of Critical Pedagogy, Anti-racism Education and Aboriginal holism; as such, I feel it would be advantageous to define them as they have informed my study:

Critical Pedagogy: Critical Pedagogy is rooted in from critical theory, as developed in the Marxist Frankfurt School of the 1920s and 1930s. According to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, critical theory "works dialectically by searching out contradictions in social arrangements in which, for example, some groups are systematically excluded form power" (Blackburn, 1996, p.84). Critical Pedagogy developed in the 1980s as a response to the need to address racial, class and gender inequalities present in schools. Critical pedagogues are committed to change and advocate social action and work toward social justice.

Anti-Racism Education- Much of the theory behind anti-racism education is

founded in the belief of the necessity of providing a voice for the marginalized from society by first combating inequality in schools, a micro-reflection of society. The marginalized are those who have been rendered silent by our education system, which has perpetuated the dominant discourse of Eurocentrism and has excluded the voices of others. Within the context of schools, anti-racism education is seen as not only taking responsibility for finding a place for minorities to express themselves, but for also being proactive in promoting necessary social change and racial justice.

Holistic Methodology/ Native Epistemology - Holistic Methodology and aboriginal ways of knowing reject the Western-based fragmented self world view in favour of a world view based on "recognizing and affirming wholeness and to disseminate the benefits to all humanity" (Ermine, 1996, p.110).

TERMINOLOGY

A distinction between the terminology used throughout the paper will be useful:

First Nation – "A term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian," which many found offensive. Although the term "First Nation" is widely used, no legal definition of it exists. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada. The term "First Nation" has also been adopted to replace the word "band" in the name of communities" (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1998, glossary).

Aboriginal peoples – "The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The 1982 Constitution defines Aboriginal peoples to include First Nations (Indians), Inuit and Metis peoples. These separate groups have unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. Their common linkage is their indigenous ancestry" (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1998, glossary).

Native – "A general term used to describe people of Aboriginal ancestry" (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1998, glossary).

Indian – This term "[d]escribes Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are not Inuit or Metis peoples. The term was first used by Christopher Columbus in 1492, believing he had reached India. The term "Indian" has declined in usage since the 1970s, when the term "First Nation" came into common usage" (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1998, glossary).

DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Certain delimitations have been set in place, such as restricting the study to three Social Studies 10 classes and not to non-academic classes of Social Studies. Because curricular connections can only be made with the grade ten Social Studies curriculum, other grade levels were not involved in the study. I have also delimited the study to my own classes, therefore the research project is limited to only myself and the student participants from one school. As well, the research project was limited to one semester.

Certain limitations in the study include my position as both an action researcher/teacher and as a White Euro-Canadian female. Clearly, I cannot speak on behalf of all Aboriginal people, given my limited Aboriginal heritage and connection to First Nations communities. In addressing issues of importance to Aboriginal people, I was aware of the need to be attentive to concerns of 'voice appropriation.' The benefits of this study aimed to first benefit Aboriginal people and not the teacher/researcher. As well, it was crucial that I ensured that the medicine wheel was used with respect, with the intent on raising the awareness of students on issues affecting Aboriginal people. It is important that these constraints are identified and in some way also inform my study.

DATA COLLECTION

As part of the data collection and analysis, it was important to set out a 'workable' timetable, as " [i]t is no good collecting more evidence than one can afford to process and reflect about. And it is no good deciding to transcribe all recordings when one knows one hasn't the time to do it. So how many lessons are monitored and which techniques are selected should all be matched to a realistic estimate of time" (Elliot, 1991, p.83). During this time as a teacher-as-participant, I kept a reflective journal of my observations, as well as the progress made and difficulties faced during my action research project, containing "personal accounts of 'observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses, and explanations'" (Kemmis as quoted in Elliot, 1991, p. 77). This enabled me to compare my

experience of the situations with those of my students. A document analysis of sections used from textbooks, lesson plans, and student work samples also provided useful information for the study. Other methods of gathering evidence in the fact-finding phase of the study included students' reflective writing exercises. At the end of the study, students were asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix E) regarding their experiences and feelings about the use of the medicine wheel as a learning tool for a greater understanding of Aboriginal people and their essential issues, as well as to share with me their reflective writing exercises throughout the study. Documenting significant events during classroom discussions also helped to determine students' perspectives on the use of the medicine wheel and provided me with opportunities to have the students "expand, explain or clarify points" (Elliot, 1991, p.80).

PROCEDURE

ASSUMPTION AND RATIONALE FOR A QUALITATIVE DESIGN

I chose to do a qualitative study, as I was interested in exploring how students would experience the use of the medicine wheel in classroom discussions as a holistic learning tool. This study, of course, required a detailed view of the students within their natural environment--a school setting, where I was committed to spending sufficient time and resources on extensive data collection. As well, I was committed to bringing my own experiences into the study and spoke as a participant and not solely as an observer who passed judgment on participants.

TYPE OF DESIGN

Critical action research is the method of qualitative inquiry that I chose to use in my three Social Studies 10 classes each with 26, 31 and 29 students respectively, in an urban, as well as culturally and academically diverse Canadian high school with a student population of over 2000 students. The school offers a broad range of both academic and non-academic courses. The study began in November, 2002 and continued until January 2003. The logical connection between my study's grounding in critical pedagogy and participatory/emancipatory action research made it a clear choice of methodology for me. Critical action research emphasizes the importance of praxis, "an informed, committed action that gives rise to knowledge rather than just successful action" (McNiff, 1998, p.8). Socially critical action research was the most appropriate methodology for this research project, as it is "the best means of opposing, modifying, and replacing socially reproductive technical practices with ones that will increase the possibilities for social justice" (Tripp, 1990, p.161). I wished to research student participants' awareness and understanding of Aboriginal people through the use of the medicine wheel in classroom discussions and personal reflections which are influenced by their own world view, that is their values and guiding principles. Student participants referred to throughout the paper have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

ROLE OF RESEARCHER

As a teacher-as-participant, my role involved being a teacher and action

researcher. As an action researcher, it is necessary to acknowledge that it requires intervention in the research study. I was an active participant as well as observer, with a clear value position brought to the study. While engaged with the student participants in the study, I was also attentive to the need not to guide or manipulate them towards the desired outcome of the study. There is a need to "negotiate a balance that is appropriate to achieve between directly helping the participants...and withholding assistance" (Tripp, 1990, p.162). Shirley Grundy (1982) emphasizes the importance of allowing group discourse from which enlightenment will flow.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a teacher-as-participant in this critical action research project, it was my responsibility to ensure a safe and respectful class environment. This environment was necessary for free discussion and disclosure of opinions and feelings, particularly when engaging in such topics of a sensitive nature, such as the racism and stereotyping facing Aboriginal people. By setting out clear expectations for the respect of others and for the opinions of others, student participants were given the opportunity to freely voice their ideas with the understanding that every student was entitled to have their point addressed. Student participants' emotional and critical responses to these sensitive issues required my discretion, as the teacher-as-participant, to address appropriately. " I must be vigilant about creating safe conditions for multiple perspectives to be accepted, probed, challenged, and analyzed, and in recognizing the moment when the flow [of discussion] must be redirected in

order to engage as many students as possible" (van der Wey, 2001, p.58). In addition, it was my responsibility as teacher/ researcher to ensure my students that their performance evaluation is in no way impacted by their choice to not participate in the research project. All students in the three classes took part in the study of Aboriginal people, cultures and issues, however not all students' voluntary responses were used in the research. As well, student participants and their parents or guardians were informed that any information that was provided was kept confidential according to their expressed wishes. Legal names of participants were not included in the research paper or in any write-up or discussion of the research; pseudonyms have been used throughout the paper. I also took care in assuring students' anonymity and confidentiality. (see Appendices A & C).

METHODS OF VERIFICATION

This action research project occurred within my own three Social Studies 10 classes thus, I had the opportunity of building trust with the participants, classified by Cresswell and Miller as "prolonged engagement and persistent observation" (1998, p.201). My on-going work with the participants over almost a three month period aided in giving my research its validity. Triangulation of the various forms of data collected, such as classroom discussions, questionnaires, reflective writing assignments, along with existing theories, allowed me to compare, contrast and corroborate the different observations and accounts of differing situations: "It is important to get data from more than one source to use as evidence to support a

particular explanation" (McNiff, 1998, p.42). As well, my validating group was made up of student participants, colleagues, fellow graduate students and my advisory committee. Feedback was provided by these interested parties to critically assess my action research methods, meanings and interpretations. As well, it was important to clarify or bracket my position as a teacher/researcher to the student participants so that they were aware of that my "biases, prejudices and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (Creswell and Miller in Creswell, 1998, p.202).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BEGINNING OF THE STUDY

I chose to begin the study with each of my classes with a brainstorming activity on Aboriginal culture and people, as it is typical in action research to begin with an exploration of the existing situation. The intent of this activity was to make current understandings known and possibly reveal any stereotypes that may be held by the students. At first, the students were slightly uncomfortable in openly stating their primarily negative generalizations, in front of a teacher, no less. Perhaps they had already begun to reflect on why it is inappropriate to do so. However, once I assured them that in order to address these issues and stereotypes, we must first openly expose them, they felt assured. The brainstorming activity revealed the following types of knowledge and understandings of Canadian aboriginal culture and people:

Historical	Contemporary	Personal
• "They live close to the land" • "cannibalism" • "buckskins and feathers" • "bows and arrows" • "peace pipes" • "teepees"	• "drunks" • "smokers" • "welfare abusers" • "solvent abusers" • "thieves" • "uneducated" • "recipients of government handouts" • "gang members" • "live on disgusting reserves" • "long, dirty hair" • "hate Caucasians"	• "They always hang out together in front of the school" • "I'm afraid of them" • "I saw one once peeing in an alley" • "They are responsible for the failure of the Meech Lake Accord" • "It seems like it is always us versus them, like a potential fight all the time"

Many students also shared with me that they have "studied Aboriginals in school many times." Sadly, this reality seemed to not be reflected in any way in our class

brainstorming activities. We would, throughout the study, address these stereotypes wherever relevant.

Rather than blithely delving into complex issues such as treaty rights, land claims and self-government, I felt it was necessary to begin "at the very beginning." Students were given three creation stories of the Blackfoot, Haida and Iroquois Nations to discuss in small groups. It was an opportunity to expose students to the Aboriginal belief in the Great Spirit, as well as the Aboriginal and "Western" understandings of the origins of Aboriginal peoples. While historians use scientific theory and understanding to date the arrival of Aboriginal peoples to North America, Aboriginal people simply believe that they have always been here. Students discussed the notion that each theory presents an assumption based on a particular understanding of truth. In addition, students were given diagrams reflecting the two world views: one a web of life, the other a pyramid, each containing illustrations of elements of the natural world that define Aboriginal spirituality: animals, birds, plants, rocks and humans. Students were asked to find the similarities and differences, as well as determine whose perspective on life and the environment was depicted in the diagrams. Students readily recognized the web of life as the Aboriginal world view, whereby all aspects of the environment are interconnected, none more important than the next, while the Western view of life, which places humans at the apex of the pyramid, presented a fragmented view of life, giving more power and control to those higher up the pyramid.

Students were made aware, during class discussions, of the significant

differences in these world views and how it would impact how both groups would address concerns related to the environment. Students brainstormed in small groups and shared their findings with the class. Of particular interest was a class discussion about the idea that there is no room for an Aboriginal world view in our competitive world, that it would take an entire transformation in the way our society thinks and works. Yet, the same class also recognized that there would be more distinct environmental and social benefits for society taking on the Aboriginal world view. The difficulty, as they saw it, rested in "how" you get our society to make this recognition. Certainly, education plays an important role.

Then, an 1854 reading by Chief Seattle was discussed, reflecting Aboriginal peoples' traditional views and their contemporary significance in terms of environmental destruction, such as deforestation, polluted waters, urban sprawl and climate change. Students, in groups looked at the position of how these differing world views led to different understandings of the notion of ownership of land and how it has implications for many of the contemporary issues regarding land claims. Students reflected on the words of Chief Seattle: "The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know…All things are connected…Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it." (Seattle in Connecting Canada, 1992, p.61). Furthermore, it was important to impress upon students the integral and sacred nature of land to Aboriginal people as it was given to them by the Creator and is their source of deepest nourishment and life, often referred to as their "mother."

In a discussion related to culture, students, based on a reading by Chief Oren

Lyons, determined that both land and Aboriginal knowledge were central to the cultures of Aboriginal people. Students also learned that the preservation of Aboriginal culture and knowledge stands to benefit all people, not just Aboriginal people. The precious knowledge held by the Elders about how to live in peace with the land and its resources was seen as the key to the survival of all living things. The Elders are willing to share; people must be willing to listen. Most importantly, students discussed how Aboriginal cultures and values differ radically from those of the dominant society. Yet making room for these Aboriginal views of community, family, Earth and the meaning and purpose of our existence was seen as having much to offer the dominant society. Many students noted how they lived in harmony and peace according to these beliefs and teachings. One student (Chris) noted: "If all people actually believed in this, the world would be a much better place."

Before entering into a discussion on treaties, I provided students with a reading from Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan (2000) to give them an understanding of the Aboriginal perspective of treaties. Students learned that both the government and Aboriginal people in pre-Confederation Canada had different motivating factors in signing treaties. The government of the day was uncertain about the stability of the country, fearing a possible attack from the United States. In the interests of opening land to more immigrant settlement and maintaining the security of the land, they were anxious to sign treaties to avoid potential violence and tension. Meanwhile, Aboriginal people were beginning to suffer severe hardships and deteriorating economic and health conditions from the impact of settlement and commercial

harvesting of the buffalo and other wildlife. This situation created anxiety for them, particularly, maintaining their way of life and means of livelihood. They were hopeful that these objectives of security would be addressed through a treaty relationship.

First Nations people saw the treaties as a partnership signed in an atmosphere of mutual respect. They believed that treaties began a relationship in which both parties benefit. Various words in the Cree language demonstrate their reception and openness to building relations with others. We studied the Cree terms "Miyo-Wîcêhtowin," meaning "having or possessing good relations," and "Wâhkôhtowin," meaning "the laws governing all relations." These sacred laws made by the Creator, according to the Elders, were essential for maintaining healthy, peaceful and harmonious nations and were the founding principles upon which the treaties with the Crown were signed:

> "These relationships were, in part, to consist of mutual ongoing caring and sharing arrangements between the treaty parties, which included a sharing of duties and responsibilities for land, shared for livelihood purposes with the newcomers" (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000, p.15).

As well, when treaties were signed, they were seen as spiritual undertakings, made before and with the Creator, making them sacred and unbreachable.

As Elders view the treaties as part of an historical continuum, from the beginning of time until now, our study of treaties began with a look at current land claims in Canada. Students began an analysis of the May 6, 2000 land claim of the people of Treaty 8 in Northern Alberta. To begin our look at treaties, students viewed

the NFB documentary Honour of the Crown (2001), depicting the twenty five year struggle of François Paulette of the Chipewyan people with the government over a 100 year old treaty signed with his people. The documentary outlines how the treaty made sweeping promises in terms of providing land, livelihood and sovereignty, in perpetuity, for his people—promises never fulfilled for a variety of reasons.

The ensuing class discussions demonstrated students increased empathy for the people of Treaty 8, for the struggles and injustices that they have faced. Students began to inquire about the significance of the annual collecting of treaty money. Sometimes for as little as five dollars, often people would often travel for days. There was astonishment that this was done, in many cases, only out of respect for the treaties. Students were beginning ask more questions about treaties and appeared more attentive to the responses of others and myself. Conversations often continued out into the hallway after class. One student (Kathleen) even stopped me on my way back to class from a fire drill to share with me how frustrated and angry she felt after having watched the documentary: "It's just wrong, what the government did to those people [Chipewyan people]." Students were interested and talking about treaty issues. There was an historical and contemporary acknowledgement of the injustices facing Aboriginal people in pursuing land claims and treaty rights; I could not have been more pleased.

On another occasion we had the opportunity of a guest presentation from the supervisor of Aboriginal education from our school board. In her presentation, she not only gave students the opportunity to challenge the myths and stereotypes facing

Aboriginal people, but also to hear and interact with her own personal challenges as an Aboriginal woman in dealing with them. She also spoke about her family's experience in residential schools: "The painful memories of residential schools are still so fresh that my mother is still unable to talk about it, so we don't." Despite this difficulty, she went on to become an educator herself. As well, as part of her presentation many of the stereotypes shared by students during our initial brainstorming activity were revisited and discussed, such as "Aboriginal people have everything paid for" and "Aboriginal people are responsible for their current situation." These stereotypes and other stereotypes were challenged by addressing the implications of colonialism and through statistics.

It was at this point that I introduced the medicine wheel and its holistic implications to the class. It was explained that we would be using the medicine wheel as a learning tool for the interpretation of important issues affecting Aboriginal people and culture in Canada. Overall, students responded positively to the idea of a new style of learning. They also made it clear that they would not have been so keen however, had it been another "textbook study" of the history of Aboriginal people and their traditions. Finally, two out-of-school trips were also planned, one was to a dramatic production of "One good story that one," by Aboriginal writer Tom King and the other was a guided tour of the Aboriginal gallery at the local museum. These capping activities served a dual purpose in the study. Students were given an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal issues outside of the classroom and from those who can speak from an Aboriginal perspective. As well, these activities helped to

create a positive learning environment as most students enjoyed the experiences.

SELECTION OF THE CASE STUDIES

The medicine wheel would be used as a tool with three case studies. These case studies were issue-based and significant to Aboriginal peoples. As well, these issues have been covered by the media, in many ways, in a sensational manner, often failing to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss the wider and often more important issues at stake. An examination of these issues, covered in various forms by the media (news footage, the Internet, as well as newspaper and magazine articles) would serve as discussion points and provide useful information. Furthermore, there was also curricular relevance to these issues. The three case studies I selected for use were: the land claims dispute in Oka, Quebec, the fishing (treaty) rights controversy in Miramishi Bay, New Brunswick, and the out of court settlements being offered by the federal government to survivors of abuse in residential schools. The case studies were always introduced as issue-based. Students had the opportunity to investigate the issue based on the learning materials provided, such as journal and magazine articles as well as television news clips.

Oka: We began this case study with background reading about the events of the dispute which involved the people from the reserve communities of Kanesatake and Kanawake in dispute with the city of Oka over their proposed expansion of a golf course onto land considered a sacred burial ground to the Mohawk people in 1990. The situation turned violent as the Mohawks barricaded roads and took up arms to

protect this land from developers. Police were sent in as well as the military to deal with the situation. Inconvenienced and angered residents of nearby communities, such as Chateauguay, were pulled into the conflict and many violent altercations resulted. As well, these disputes were often racial in nature. In the ensuing conflict, a police officer was shot and killed during one of the provocations when teargas was launched by the police onto the reserve. Eventually the military tore down the barricades and as a result of the conflicts, the golf course expansion halted.

Students watched the crisis unfold on Okanada (1990), a gritty, behind-the-scene low-budget documentary shot from behind the Mohawk barricade and then on CBC news featuring coverage of the same event. The two videos provided an excellent opportunity for the discussion of biases and perspectives in the media that inevitably shape our understanding of an event. Students were then given newspaper and magazine articles of the crisis and joined in small group discussions using the medicine wheel with its related questions as their guide. In their small groups, students worked their way around the wheel, recording their responses, while I circulated amongst the class. Lastly, students completed, on their own, the spiritual element of the medicine wheel with their personal reflections of the issue and then joined the whole group for a class discussion.

Miramishi Bay, Burnt Church: This case study involved the events of a fishing rights dispute in New Brunswick, whereby Mi'kmaq Donald Marshall challenged the courts and the government on his peoples' treaty rights to fish year round in 2000. The Marshall Decision, as it came to be known, made by the Supreme Court

guaranteed this right based a treaty signed by the Mi'kmaq people with the government in 1760. Mi'kmaq fishers quickly took to the waters after the decision was made. Outraged non-Aboriginal lobstermen, held to a conservation ban by the government on fishing lobsters during certain months of the year, angrily took to the waters and began ripping out Mi'kmaq lobster traps. Violent altercations between the groups erupted, involving the use of terror, such as setting Mi'kmaq boats on fire and firing shots at their boats on the water. The federal government's department of fisheries and oceans was forced to take action. They began to seize Mi'kmaq traps from the waters, escalating the tension. Mi'kmaq fishers continued to trap lobsters in the communities of Burnt Church and Indian Brook while the government worked on a solution. While a settlement package was offered to the Mi'kmaq people, they refused it, preferring to recognize their treaty rights to fish year round. The Supreme Court later clarified its ruling to recognize that the department of fisheries and oceans has the right to regulate the industry. The tension still exists.

In this case study, students were given background information to read and study. We followed up this activity with a viewing of CBC news footage and broke into small group discussion. Provided with more readings, students used the medicine wheel as a guide. Students, by this point, had gleaned on their own that there was no set direction with which to use the medicine wheel, yet most students preferred to start with the interpretation of the issue. Each element of the medicine wheel provided opportunities for discussion that would connect to other aspects of the medicine wheel. Later, we discussed the event as a class.

Residential Schools: In this case study, students learned the assimilationist polices of the government in dealing with Aboriginal people. The 2002 offer of out-of-court settlements served as a discussion point on the issue of the responsibility of the Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian churches and the federal government in compensating the survivors of abuse in residential schools. Residential schools were prevalent across Canada in the early twentieth century and were created by the government and often run by churches. Together their aim was to obliterate Aboriginal culture and language. Consequently, it was made illegal for any Aboriginal child not to attend residential schools. Parents could be jailed for failure to comply. In the schools, many Aboriginal children were routinely punished and abused physically, emotionally and sexually. As well, these children were separated from their families and were forbidden from speaking their own languages or practicing their culture. Furthermore, most students did not emerge with skills that would enable them to cope well with white society, particularly when white society did not value *educated* Indians. It is widely recognized that the abuse suffered in these schools accounts for a great deal of the social difficulties many Aboriginal communities face today. The tearing apart of family life and structures, the devaluation of a people and their culture, as well as the abuse, has resulted in a cycle of difficulties with the education system, alcoholism, drug abuse, as well as hopelessness, disillusionment and despair for many. Much healing needs to happen to begin to repair the damage done over several decades of residential schooling.

As a class, we read and discussed an article from the journal Residential

School Update, providing students with information about the goals of residential schools, the roles of Churches and government, as well as the impact of the schools on the students past and present. Then, students watched a documentary produced by Cross Currents on residential schools. Finally, students were given an article from the Edmonton Journal entitled "$1.7B Offer to Settle Native Abuse Charges." This article, by Ed Struzik, dated December 21, 2002, was both timely and relevant. The article spoke about the overwhelming number of abuse victims waiting for the courts to address their cases. The government is offering these alternative settlements, which will be faster, but will not pay out to victims nearly as much as court settlements. As well, there will be no compensation for loss of culture, and payouts for sexual, physical and emotional abuse would be ranked according to the level of severity on a chart. Students were asked to use the medicine wheel again in small groups, as a tool in determining the responsibility of the government and churches in providing fair settlements to survivors of abuse in residential schools. The entire class later re-grouped for a discussion of their findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMERGENT THEMES

Several common themes emerged in the study relating to the students' responses to the issues discussed, and the manner in which we addressed the issues. I have discussed these themes with relevant quotations from students' personal reflections, questionnaires and classroom discussions. I hope that this will provide readers with insights into delving into the complex issues of Aboriginal rights, treaties, and self-determination in the Social Studies 10 classroom using a holistic approach to learning.

WHITE GUILT AND RESISTANCE

As a result of the difficult nature of many of the issues related to racism and stereotyping, research (Carson & Johnston, 2000; Daniel Tatum, 1992; Filax, 1997 and Freire, 1989) indicates that those attempting to bring about active discourse for breaking down injustices may encounter varying degrees of resistance to the notion of accepting responsibility for, or complicity with, said reality. In my own research project, a minority of students also experienced varying degrees of resistance to the notions of special status or entitlement as a result of being Canada's First Peoples:

Thomas wrote:

> They have lost their culture and few follow the complete traditions anymore. Now they are no different from the Canadian sitting next to you, yet they want to be treated better than the average Canadian.

Daniel wrote:

> I do not think Natives should be any different from the rest of us. Rip up the treaties and it will be the best thing for them. Natives cannot expect us to do everything for them so they can get out of their troubled situation.

Charmaine wrote:

> I feel that in a way Aboriginals should live just like any other Canadian citizen. They complain that they don't get enough, but they do get extra / special things.

Adele wrote:

> I believe that what is best for the Aboriginal people and the rest of Canadians is for …Aboriginals to live like everyone else…This will bring equality to our country that will better our country in the future.

The notions of equality and fairness were challenging for these students; to them these cultural constructs are deeply embedded and singularly defined. They found it difficult to recognize that hegemonic structures in society often prevent the accessibility of equality and fairness to marginalized Aboriginal people. As well, it is important to note that the attempt to adequately define these terms to one set construct is highly problematic, as perspective and circumstance greatly affect their meanings.

Daniel did, however, acknowledge that the study did help him understand the issues much better, but it did not change his views on Aboriginal people. He noted that "the White man is somewhat responsible for Natives current situation." Interestingly, while taking the stance that "Natives" should take more initiative, he also noted that "they are in a tough situation and need help to get out of it. The best way to help them is to educate them." He used the quotation: "Give a man a fish and

he eats for a day, teach a man how to fish and he has food for a lifetime." While Daniel, admittedly, did not feel any more compassionate towards Aboriginal people, he recognized that despite his belief in an individual's responsibility for him/herself, that non-Aboriginals are in some way responsible for Aboriginals' betterment, through increased awareness of the issues or through education for making improvements to their life. Another response came from Kimberleigh, who wrote:

> I think Aboriginals are just normal people and truly there shouldn't even be a unit on them in our education. I know I would not feel comfortable in our classroom if I were an Aboriginal, even if it is a reality we're dealing with. It is important to know their culture and beliefs, but to go into such depth, I just don't think that's needed.

Interestingly Kimberleigh also noted that she felt that the class felt more comfortable talking about what they thought about Aboriginal people because of the medicine wheel. She wrote the following in her questionnaire:

> I think our class felt more comfortable talking about what they thought about aboriginals (sic) because the medicine wheel pointed out some topics to focus on.

The "focus" provided by the medicine wheel was evidenced by the questions it posed, and whose responses were instrumental in bringing forth other interconnected and related issues and topics for discussion. Consequently, students were more comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions because they felt more prepared to share ideas about which previously reflected. Yet she still feels very neutral on most of the issues discussed. She noted:

> I never felt negatively about them in the first place, and I still do not. I do not feel sorry for them because a lot of choices are their own. I have no thoughts really.

The notion of discomfort regarding the discussion of controversial issues can also be expected. While Kimberleigh agrees that we should know about "Aboriginal culture and beliefs," and she acknowledges the need to "deal with the reality," the very emotional nature of discourse creates for her resistance to openly challenging one current reality--the marginalization of Aboriginal people.

Some students had difficulty reconciling the impact of post-colonialism on Aboriginal people. Geoff wrote:

> I personally have always felt that the past is the past, and that Natives should not receive special status in today's society. Instead everyone should have to work for their prosperity...While the actions against the natives were wrong, we must move on. Canada cannot continue to look after minorities (even if it is the right thing to do) because no matter what decision is made, there will always be a minority opposing it.

The assumption that all Canadians can, are, and should be equal is made clear. Geoff forwards the Euro-Canadian notions that a strong work ethic and equal opportunity are available to Aboriginal people to improve their own lives. The understanding that the individual must overcome barriers to achieve prosperity is clear: that is, collectively, as a minority group, they should not expect any special recognition. We must all accept the hegemonic structures, and any attempt to challenge said domination by the majority is a mere nuisance; despite being "the right thing to do," it must be opposed. He acknowledges the oppression Aboriginal people faced and continue to face, yet collectively, as a society, we all "move on." The assumption here is that we are all equal and the societal structures are in place that will allow this to happen. It is the deeply engrained Western ideals of individualism, equality,

freedom and democracy that have shaped Geoff's understanding of the world.

Perhaps one of the most challenging responses came from Marjorie:

> I believe that the Natives should grow up a bit and stop being so dependent on the government and their treatys (sic)...This study did not help me to challenge stereotypes because some of them are completely true. I think differently about them [Aboriginal people]...Overall I feel a more negative view about Aboriginal people than I did before because it [this study] made me realize my real feeling about all the Natives and how their life is.

Even in her personal reflection on the issue regarding the responsibility of the federal government and the churches in redressing the victims of abuse in residential schools, she commented:

> The Natives should get something in return for what happened to them, but they should not get as much as they asked for.

No explanation as to why was provided.

In addition, it was Marjorie who had the most emotional response to class discussions regarding our responsibility to respect treaties. She clearly felt that Aboriginal people need "to get some ambition." In explaining how social issues such as higher than average incarceration rates, increased levels of poverty and high suicide rates (previously discussed in class) must first be addressed before we can make such lofty expectations, Marjorie suddenly became very distraught. I then explained to her that compassion on part of all people is needed to help Aboriginal communities get through these collective difficulties. Faced with some objection to her position from her classmates, Marjorie no longer wanted to take part in the class discussion and was near tears, yet simply maintained that "We owe them nothing." I assured her that her

opinion was important to the entire discussion and, as such, needed for balanced perspectives. I told her that I appreciated her honesty, which is needed in particular to challenge and possibly open new doorways for us. My role in this situation was to facilitate conversation while ensuring that all opinions were respected, while still maintaining a firm stance on the goals of social justice and critical agency.

Later that day Marjorie came to talk to me, but did not wish to speak about the issues discussed in class any further; She wanted only to assure me that she was fine.

Marjorie was, throughout the study, closed to any new understandings and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and people. I also noted her disinterest in actively listening during the presentation of the Aboriginal education consultant. It was also noticed by the consultant, who saw it in her body language and general inattentiveness. Nor was she responsive to the use of the medicine wheel as a tool for holistic learning. She stated:

> It [the medicine wheel] didn't really help me because that is not the way to study and do notes…The medicine wheel has not changed my perspectives…I did not like the medicine wheel.

The introduction of new ways of knowing and understanding can be challenging to one's strongly held personal beliefs. Marjorie at this point was not able to overcome her resistance to new understandings of the historic subordination and systemic racism facing Aboriginal Canadians.

One of the primary aims of the study was to encourage students to adopt the holism of Aboriginal epistemology, thereby engaging their hearts as much as their minds when reflecting on controversial issues affecting Aboriginal peoples.

Unfortunately, these few students, the minority in each of the three classes, were unable to do so. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) discusses the need to learn about the realities of other people, but also to acknowledge that we come from different subject positions and therefore will interpret moments differently. Certainly these students did come to interpret these issues and events based on their own understandings and values, and were in some way prevented from opening up to seeing different world views and perspectives.

ACTIVE DISCOURSE

An essential aspect of critical action research requires that it engage participants in a democratic process of participation and collaboration through active discourse. The goal of this critical action research project was to help open up class discussions, enabling students to feel free to express their opinions about controversial or sensitive issues affecting Aboriginal people. Class discussions were structured around the medicine wheel; the educational concepts and corresponding questions guided our discussions. Most students felt that the use of the medicine wheel helped in this capacity. Laureen indicated:

> I think that everyone felt free to express their opinion and comment on the issues. You could tell that people were really trying to be respectful, regardless of their opinion.

While Andre felt:

> A lot of things were said by people that I thought would never say anything.

The key to successful critical action research would entail the full participation of all

students in class discussions where they would feel free to share and that no voices would be silenced. While many students noted in their questionnaires that they felt more prepared to come to class ready to discuss the issues, they also felt that the class atmosphere had previously been established as an open one, where most students already felt quite free to share their views. However, many noted that the use of the medicine wheel was helpful in fostering respect during discussions: the respect of their fellow classmates and their views and respect for the issues being discussed. It became particularly important that the elements of respect and trust were established in order to discuss topics of a sensitive nature in a responsible manner. Brianne wrote:

> It [the medicine wheel] let us know that we can talk about the 'spiritual' part of issues and not just the facts set out in front of us.

Jeremy reflected:

> The medicine wheel didn't just teach about critical thinking, it also showed a hint of how to think with your heart.

An appreciation of the holistic nature of the medicine wheel and the connection between the mind, body and spirit was made. Students were asked to reflect upon their own guiding principles in resolving each of the case studies, leading them to preferred consequences of each issue, that is, what would be for the greater good. Previously, students had been asked to think only critically about issues and to keep emotions and feelings distant and detached. They were being asked to use their logic and reasoning in dealing with issues. A more natural approach, akin to how human beings usually address concerns, was a welcome change for most students. Many

commented that the holistic nature of the medicine wheel not only gave them a better appreciation of Aboriginal perspectives and ways of thinking, but also increased their own understandings both of decision-making and of Aboriginal issues and concerns. Students tried to "get a handle on the ways their knowledge shapes their identity and agency, and to reflect critically on how their present knowledge frames and constrains their action" (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p.23). Taking in the spiritual aspect of their being allowed them to reflect not only on how they would make resolutions to the discussed issues, but also on what forces or guiding principles in their life lead them in such a direction. However, Evelyn felt:

> The medicine wheel looked at facts and perspectives, but also used feelings...I don't really like this, I think it makes you biased.

Evelyn comments on the discomfort she felt in actively involving herself, her emotions, feelings and values in the study of sensitive issues. There is a certain satisfaction in being able to distance oneself from complex social issues. Following a logical reasoned approach to issue analysis enables one to let the "facts speak for themselves," and allows the individual to interact with the issue but at a comfortable distance. In contrast, the medicine wheel asks the student to invest something of him/herself in the issue; active engagement of the student in bringing to the issues their own understanding, skills and values is crucial. Take for instance, Jane, who wrote about the conflict in Burnt Church:

> I can only speak from the point of view of someone from a Nova Scotian family who has lived there for more than 400 years. When the European settlers first came to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, they too, were

> promised a land for themselves, with waters teeming with fish ripe for the taking.

Or Jeremy who wrote:

> I used to live in N.S. and my parents are stereotypical, so I had a very one way message and this [study] gave me a new perspective...Before I was influenced by stereotypes.

One's own identity and experiences will shape one's active reading of the issues. In the cases of Jane and Jeremy, their reading of the issue regarding fishing rights has been directly influenced by their past and close personal connections to living, and, as Jane noted, struggling to protect their livelihood in a fishing community. Certainly their experiences with the issues were much richer for having invested much self-reflection. In addition, many students felt similar feelings to Chris, who wrote:

> The medicine wheel helped us get acquainted with the issues being discussed and it allowed for many viewpoints to be shared.

Students were encouraged to self-reflect upon the issues and then share their views with the class. I believe this to have been successful due to the safe and open classroom environment that was established, in part, by the philosophy behind the medicine wheel that had guided our class discussions. The philosophy of the holism of the medicine wheel brought balance and perspectives to light, as well as revealed an interdependence that encouraged students to learn from one another. In our classes, it aided in opening up conversation and drawing out new perspectives. Certainly a variety of opinions were heard and each new voice opened new directions for us to explore in class discussions. This open and sharing environment was reflected in a change in the physical set-up of the classroom during the duration of our

study. Desks in rows were moved into a sharing circle to cultivate an open and co-operative environment. Shaun stated:

> I think that the whole idea of sitting in a circle helped people open up with their opinions.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The emancipatory aspect of this critical action research was evident. Several students explored:

> the ways in which their practices are shaped and constrained by wider social (cultural, economic and political) structures and consider[ed] whether they [could] intervene to release themselves from the constraints (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998, p.24).

Several common themes evolved from the study regarding students' feelings about the greater good for Aboriginal people. Primary concerns mentioned were: loss and devaluation of Aboriginal culture and language, discrimination, and issues of economic marginalization. Commonly mentioned solutions to these problems involved increased government respect and genuine concern for Aboriginal people, increased compensatory measures on behalf of the government for past wrong-doings (such as respecting land claims and financial compensation for past injustices), as well as respect for Aboriginal and treaty rights. Some students also recognized that colonisation is responsible for many of the problems faced by Aboriginal communities and argued for greater self-determination for Aboriginal peoples. Charmaine wrote:

> I feel that the natives (sic) believe they have the right to fish due to the signing of a treaty and that treaty should be respected because it is the only thing they

have left to identify themselves as native (sic).

Charmaine is aware of the strong connection Aboriginal people have to land and its resources as central to their way of life. Furthermore, the treaties are recognized as something to be respected because of their significance to the well being of Aboriginal people. She is making the connection that sacred treaty rights that are rightfully honoured will result in the preservation of a culture and people. Brianne wrote:

> We need to inform people of what the Aboriginal people value and teach people to be more respectful of that. The government needs to find a different approach to this situation [Burnt Church dispute], without offending or disrespecting Aboriginals.

It is in this comment that Brianne recognizes the differing world view or values of Aboriginal people from that of the dominant Euro-Canadian one. Current government approaches fail to respect Aboriginal world views, particularly those dealing with treaties, land use and land claims. Through her own sense of individual agency, she also forwards the need to make others mindful of this reality, that is, to extend this awareness and understanding to the greater society. Brianne, who sees herself as a responsible member of Canadian society, feels that it is our responsibility to be more aware of Aboriginal values in order to better understand and therefore address social situations, such as the fishing dispute in New Brunswick.

Aboriginal rights and treaties are a significant issue and many students felt strongly that the government had a responsibility to uphold Aboriginal rights and treaties. Kathleen wrote:

> I feel that the Natives should be able to fish out of season because of the treaty between them and the government in 1760. Even if it was 300 years ago, it is still valid and should be taken seriously. The government should uphold their promises.

Edward reflected:

> I believe that the Native fishers feel that it is a matter of honour to be able to fish all year long. My guiding principles force me to agree with the Natives...because they have signed legal documents with the government.

Rick recorded:

> I believe that this incident would not have happened if the government paid more attention to Native rights. If the government had been more caring and dealt with all of the Native issues, the crisis [Oka Crisis] might not have even occurred. The anger that the [Aboriginal] people had of the government ignoring them is what fueled the crisis.

These students are forwarding their personal values by suggesting that the treaties are to be honoured by the government because, not only are they sacred to Aboriginal people, they are also legally binding. While it is hoped that the government would honour the treaties in the trust that they were undertaken by Aboriginal peoples (who viewed and continue to view them as sacred and unbreachable), it is also recognized by the students that the Aboriginals must play by the rules of the dominant society. Consequently, they argue that the government has a legal obligation to uphold these *signed* treaties. The overall responsibility of the government to address these issues in good faith is made clear in these reflections.

Moreover, some students had difficulty with the economic inequality faced by many Aboriginal people. Most often the government was cited as the reason for the economic marginalization of Aboriginal people. Brock wrote:

> The Mi'kmaq people should be given rights in order to help continue to maintain their traditional lifestyle. They need help out of poverty and poor living conditions. The money they receive from fishing could significantly impact their lifestyle.

As well, some students also connected many of the social problems of Aboriginal people with their economic marginalization. Kathleen noted:

> The most pressing concern facing Aboriginal people is their current life standard. Housing on reserves can be terrible, good job opportunities are rare and many do not see education as important...

Roland thought the following:

> It is our responsibility as citizens to make sure that [Aboriginal] people have at least a semblance of equal opportunities.

Yet, the full and active participation of Aboriginal people in Canadian society will only occur when there is a restoration of control over their affairs to First Nations. Students identified two key themes for the justification of Aboriginal self-government: a moral and legal obligation to Aboriginal people and greater efficiency in addressing Aboriginal affairs. John, reflecting on the need for greater self-determination of Aboriginal people wrote:

> There is a need of a new relationship [between the government and First Nations] founded on respect. Self-government could be that new relationship.

And Charmaine who wrote:

> I think self government would create a new value system, give control over affairs and resources, and provide a new relationship founded on respect of First Nations.

John and Charmaine are commenting on the need for a reevaluation of the current political power structures which fail to meet the needs of Aboriginal people because

they do not consider Aboriginal world views or perspectives. Jessica wrote:

> With self-government, they [Aboriginal people] will be able to incorporate their belief systems into the government.

As well, many students also felt that self-government would be more pragmatic and efficient, benefiting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Mark wrote:

> If they got self-government, that would put them in a better position to steer their economic and political courses, and that would give them a greater opportunity for prosperity.

Grant thought:

> Aboriginals have to have more power and control over their internal issues, as well as expand their jurisdiction to things such as social programs, natural resources, and land use rights. Clearly this form of government would be more efficient, and, as is shown by Sechelt [First Nation], will bring many benefits.

Making specific reference to the Sechelt First Nations positive experience with self-government, Charmaine wrote:

> I believe that self-government would improve their health, housing, education and employment. They could do things they want and want they think is best, to benefit them. Self-government in Sechelt has made the band stronger and has given them the power to have control over their own situations.

Kathleen wrote:

> The Sechelt band is able to make more decisions, has more access to funds, and has become stronger with their own system of government.

As well Minh reflected on the Oka Crisis:

> I think that they [the Mohawks] deserve the land…The damage to Native culture has been done over centuries. We can minimize further impacts by giving Natives more political power.

Beyond the need for cultural preservation, these comments reflect the students' appreciation that current social structures are in need of change. The postcolonial political reality of First Nations people is identified as not meeting their needs, and that increased self-determination of Aboriginal people is a possible solution.

NEW UNDERSTANDINGS

Initiating changes in students' understanding of Aboriginal people, culture and issues was key to this critical action research. Four key themes demonstrating changes in students' understandings emerged from the data: new understandings of Aboriginal peoples' viewpoints and ways of life; the fallacious nature of Aboriginal stereotypes; the recognition of Aboriginal rights; and treaties and the hardships faced over the years by Aboriginal people.

Many students noted that they felt that they had gained a new understanding of Aboriginal concerns by looking at the issues from an Aboriginal point of view. In addition, many students also took into consideration the feelings expressed by Aboriginal people about the issues. Many students shared a similar sentiment to Chris:

> The medicine wheel helped me to see things through an Aboriginal viewpoint and almost experience the same problems that they have.

For instance, when discussing the Oka Crisis, most students were clearly and strongly opposed to any use of violence in attaining goals, and certainly the Oka Crisis was definitely portrayed in the media for its sensational appeal in this regard. However,

with the medicine wheel--in asking students to take into consideration other factors by asking and answering pertinent questions--most students saw beyond this singular bearing to the issue, and read into it new meanings. Many students came to understand that despite the negative tone associated with the issue, there were some direct benefits, apart from the land, to be gained by Aboriginal people. Edward wrote in his personal reflection about the Oka crisis:

> Because the Mohawks used force, the Natives' position was brought to the attention of every Canadian.

Andy wrote the following:

> After the [Oka] crisis, the Natives seemed to have gained a stronger unity.

Paul felt this way:

> We already know that Aboriginals have been getting discriminated against practically since the Europeans first settled in Canada, and that attempts have been made to assimilate them to Canadians, even though they are technically true Canadians. Oka was a symbol of all of their grievances.

Reflecting on her own personal feelings about the issue, Kathleen stated:

> I believe I would have done the same thing as the Mohawks, if I had the courage. Standing up for yourself, uniting and putting a stop to something unwanted takes a lot of bravery. They stood up for what they believe in. They showed the government that Aboriginals were no joke and cannot be ignored...

The responses of these students show their deeper understandings of the Oka Crisis. It was now more than a struggle for land claims, it was a symbol of Aboriginal voice, unity and grievances.

When it came to understanding treaties, many students felt that while the treaties should be respected, they struggled with a recurring theme relating to the

treaties: the impact and relevance of change on treaties over the course of time.

When discussing the fishing dispute in Burnt Church, for example, some students brought up the contemporary concerns of depleting fish and lobster stocks faced by fishers on the Atlantic coast and the use, by some Aboriginal people, of technological, rather than traditional, methods of fishing. The absence of these types of problems over 300 years ago made present circumstances more difficult in their view. Kimberleigh wrote this personal reflection on the Burnt Church dispute:

> I think the government needs to adapt the treaties because they were made so long ago that the world isn't nearly the same as it used to be and the agreements don't apply anymore.

The students discussed the notion that there would have to be some sort of compromise between the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal fishers. Some students felt that it could possibly be settled in a "democratic fashion," as would be evidenced by a referendum for all Canadians. For instance, Geoff wrote this about the Oka Crisis:

> I believe that ultimately it should be the citizens of Canada who make the decision about what should happen, perhaps by doing an electronic vote.

This opinion clearly reflects a western-based hegemonic resolution to the problem, in which majority rules; this may not only be an inappropriate solution the issue, but quite possibly may further marginalize Aboriginal people. Charmaine acknowledged this marginalization of Aboriginal people when she wrote:

> Since the Native people are a minority, their rights are taken for granted. The government is more concerned about the majorities (sic) concerns and tries to please them first.

Furthermore, as was noted by Brianne, there remained a recognition that:

> the most pressing concern facing Aboriginal people is the destruction of their culture and assimilation of their people because the government and Canadian people are constantly urging natives to change.

Thus, while there was an awareness that in certain circumstances perhaps change is necessary, it also comes at the cost of respecting Aboriginal treaties and ways of life. Dana and Carly also noted the government is responsible for creating many "obstacles" or "hoops" through which Aboriginal people must go. As a result, many of their treaties currently are not being honoured, or their claims are caught up in the courts.

The breakdown of stereotypes was also cited by students as a major change in their understanding of Aboriginal people. The added awareness of Aboriginal perspectives on the issues was most often mentioned as the reason for this change in understanding.

Stacey noted:

> All of the stereotypes I once had of Aboriginals have been contradicted and I now have a far better understanding.

Murray forwarded:

> This [study] helped me to learn about the culture of indigenous people, which led me away from stereotypes towards this culture.

Carly wrote:

> The medicine wheel has made me look at a more Native point of view. I think about what this is to the Natives before I take a stand on my opinion.

Brandon wrote about the specific breakdown of stereotypes that he experienced:

> Overall, I feel a more positive view of Aboriginal people than I did before. Prior to this [study], I did not hold them in high regard due to their gangs, abuse, gas sniffing, etc.

Moreover, the following students noted that it was the holistic aspect of the medicine wheel that helped them to challenge stereotypes. Dana wrote:

> It's a more reflective way of looking at things in that it allows you to see more of the big picture.

While Brianne noted specifically that:

> We had to talk about fairness, different views and power.

Shaun and Jane saw the medicine wheel as a tool to get to the truth behind the issues. Shaun forwarded the following:

> The medicine wheel helped challenge stereotypes by pointing out the real side of the story.

Jane wrote:

> We found out the truth and got past most of the stereotypes.

These "truths" were deemed as the hardships or oppressive forces faced by Aboriginal people in postcolonial Canada. It was learning about the difficulties of Aboriginal people, past and present, which helped them to come to new understandings.

Mark wrote:

> I used to think Aboriginals were crying about nothing, but now I realize that they have gone through a lot of hardships.

Tasneen felt this way:

> I feel more positive about them because I got to understand more about what's going on. I didn't really care before.

Erin had this thought:

> I changed my outlook on how they live and who they are, I now understand their background and hardships that they went through, especially residential schooling.

Knowledge of the history of Aboriginal people was crucial in guiding students to new understandings of these contemporary issues discussed in class. Awareness of the lifestyle for Aboriginal people, both preceding and during Canadian colonisation, gave students the necessary framework for developing their own personal understandings.

COMPASSION

Increased awareness of the issues affecting Aboriginal people, decreased apathy and the deconstruction of stereotypes helped many students become more compassionate toward Aboriginal people, culture and issues. Two key themes that emerged from student responses illustrating this compassion were the notions of the need for taking responsibility and actively listening to the voice of Aboriginal people.

Several students had written in their personal reflections on the case studies the word "responsibility." They indicated that in some ways society: the government, citizens, churches, or the general "we," all have a responsibility for the well being of Aboriginal people. This notion of responsibility would not have the same connotation as it had for the colonizers -- those who felt it was their *responsibility to control and assimilate Aboriginal people*. Rather, they saw it as a responsibility to both acknowledge the history of colonialism and its impact on Aboriginal people and to rectify the situation to the best of our ability. These students wrote in their personal

reflections about the abuses suffered by Aboriginal children who were forced into residential schools and the responsibility society has to openly address the issue. This need to come to terms with our colonial past is demonstrated by Ben who wrote:

> We [Canadians] need to discuss the issue instead of bottling it up and trying to forget about it...Preferred consequences would be to have good relations.

The responsibility we have to Aboriginal people is exemplified in the comments from these students, which show empathy and concern for the "other." Evelyn wrote this about the residential schools case study:

> They suffered abuse by the government and churches, and these groups must settle to show they admit they were wrong, and try to make things right for Aboriginal people.

Brock felt this way about the same issue:

> I believe what we have to learn is the horrible truth to our history...I believe no matter what kind of trouble it would cost to have to do a court case with every native (sic) individual, we were the ones in history who created this problem and we must be the ones to solve it.

John wrote in his reflection:

> First Nations people have suffered a disintegration of political and social institutions, of culture, language and economic existence. Although this [court settlement] can never fully reimburse them, it can help them get back on the right track again.

These sentiments were echoed by other students who also argued that it is difficult to quantify suffering and that money alone cannot make up for all that has been done to Aboriginal people. Nonetheless, good will gestures of acknowledgement on behalf of the government and opportunities for healing be afforded. These students' comments indicate their proclivity for compassion and concern for the welfare of Aboriginal

people.

Interestingly, many students posed their own on-going reflective questions in their personal reflections in trying to come to terms with these very difficult situations affecting Aboriginal people. Dana wrote this about the Oka Crisis:

> No one would build a golf course over a Christian or Catholic or Protestant or Jewish cemetery, so why over a Mohawk one?

While Tina wrote:

> How would you feel if someone wanted to go over your dead with a golf course?

Andrea wrote:

> When will Aboriginals stop being seen as of less value to our society?

Brett felt this way about the Oka Crisis:

> You have to use empathy. Imagine if your mother or father were buried there and someone wanted to turn the land into a mini-mart or a 7-eleven. Would you want that to happen?

These reflective responses made by the students demonstrate their increased empathy and compassion, by taking it upon themselves to actively position themselves in the place of the "other." They have chosen to address the issues by taking on an added emotional impact by taking a complex social issue and putting it into a personal context.

In addition to responsibility, many students also noted the importance of actively listening to voices of Aboriginal people. Chris felt this way about the residential schools issue:

> The government should not take advantage of their power but listen to the

Aboriginals.

Charmaine reflected about the Oka crisis:

> The golf course wants to expand in the name of economics, power, and opportunities, but they are forgetting to listen to the concerns and needs of the Aboriginal people who want to live peacefully.

True listening is not passive, but active and holistic, and thus requires of the listener to use not only their ears to hear, but also their mind and heart. As well, listening on the part of the government and Canadian citizens thereby gives voice to Aboriginal people and their concerns. Consequently, the message is heard, but more importantly, it gives way to the voice behind the message, which can lead to greater empowerment of the people.

CHAPTER SIX

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This study has explored the experiences of three classes of Social Studies 10 students using a holistic methodology when discussing and addressing issues of significance to Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The participants were all students in my own classes in a large urban high school. While I had a large number and wide range of participants, my study is in no way intended to be generalizable. The complexity of responses is indicative of individual students bringing their own experiences to their interpretations of the issues and constructions of their meanings to them.

While in many ways this study was challenging, it was at the same time very rewarding and worthwhile. In pursuing this critical action research study, I hoped to change students' negative perceptions of Aboriginal people as perpetuated by stereotypes and lack of appreciation of the culture, history and people. I hoped to bring to light new understandings of Aboriginal people and concern for their well being, as well as to instill in students a sense of social justice. I believe that in many respects this study has accomplished these primary aims.

CONCERNS AND SUGGESTIONS

Some concerns that I have at the end of the study deal with students' sense of agency. While many students noted that they wished that there were "less racism and more opportunities for Aboriginal people," (Murray) I wonder how they will they

move beyond words with this belief. Will they actively support or proceed to make space for Aboriginal people in society? Critical action research has a recursive feature in that "it aims to help people to investigate reality in order to change it" (Fals Borda, in Kemmis and Wilkinson, p. 24). It is hoped, yet remains uncertain, that students will, as Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change that you want to see."

Another concern that I have deals with students' interpretation and use of the medicine wheel as a learning tool. Several students noted that the non-linear format, cyclical or "somewhat repetitive" nature of the medicine wheel made it "time-consuming," "difficult" and "confusing." They felt that it was not always straight-forward and clear. Shaun wrote the following in his questionnaire:

> It [the medicine wheel] was kind of hard to follow at first and the complication factor was intimidating.

These responses to the use of the medicine wheel are problematic, as the emancipatory and participatory features of this study are critical. It may indicate that some students did not feel as though they were able to contribute completely and fully to the study, as the nature of the medicine wheel impeded their ability to do so. However, it is also important to note that some of the apprehension to the use of the medicine wheel by some students is due to their impression that: "I had to work!" Several open ended questions requiring personal, historical and critical reflection were asked of students, which may have contributed to some of this uneasiness of using the medicine wheel. Nevertheless, greater attention to the simplification of the medicine wheel may be an appropriate response for educators willing to partake in a

similar study, particularly with student participants who may experience difficulty with abstractions and higher-level cognitive functioning.

Another concern is that of the over-generalization and simplification of complex Aboriginal issues and perspectives. As the study's participants were at the grade ten level, I felt that a certain degree of generalizing was necessary to help students gain an appreciation for the *collective* identity of Aboriginal people, while also acknowledging differences amongst them. Realistically, no one can speak on behalf of an entire people, nor can a people be characterized by one voice. However, by addressing some commonly held concerns, such as treaty rights, stereotyping and self-determination, I hoped that students could mindfully move on to deal with the specific concerns of First Nations, such as those that were addressed in the case studies of Oka and Burnt Church.

Finding space in the curriculum is always a concern. While this study took place over an extended period of time, many educators will inevitably feel the pressure of an overloaded curriculum and may not feel they have the time to be able to adequately address all of the issues presented in this study. I cannot impress upon those educators willing to take on the responsibility of critical education to find the time and opportunities to address these issues. They are there.

Despite these and other challenges, there is much critical work to be done in the classroom to address serious contemporary issues affecting Aboriginal people. This study is indicative of some of the successes that can occur provided there is intent and preparedness on behalf of the critical educator. The keys, I believe, to

success in this study were the students' awareness of the Aboriginal understandings of treaties and the colonial history of Aboriginal people prior to approaching the issues. The medicine wheel, used as a tool for better understanding of the contemporary issues, was only successful because there was this prior and ongoing understanding of the larger issues. Interested critical educators must be willing to adequately prepare students in understanding the history of Aboriginal people in Canada before taking up discussion and analysis of these issues.

The study involved students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. A few students commented to me at the beginning of the study that they felt that we should be studying *all* the ethnic groups represented in Canada, not solely Aboriginal people. However, in this same discussion, they also recognized the unique place and historical connection that Aboriginal people have in Canada, that other ethnic groups, however significant to Canada's development either historically or contemporarily, simply to do not have. This in itself was a significant starting place for class discussion.

RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

Many of the student participants were highly receptive to the study and many wrote in their questionnaires that they felt that Aboriginal issues would be of great importance in Canada in the future and that their understanding of these issues is greater than that of most Canadians. A significant reason as to why it is in the best interest of Social Studies educators to take up these challenges in the classroom is to give students the opportunities to address culturally sensitive issues in a open, caring

and responsible classroom environment. Furthermore, one of the primary aims of Social Studies education is the creation of responsible citizens. Central to being a responsible citizen, I believe, is having an awareness of important local national or international issues and taking action on them. Knowledge of the history of Aboriginal people and issues, along with a sensitivity to their well being, enabled students to address these contentious subjects responsibly. Moreover, students developed the skills necessary to interpret and address the variety of meanings of the important concepts of power, equality and fairness. Students were challenged to investigate and understand that there is no universal application of these commonly held notions. For instance, Connor wrote this about the use of power in the Burnt Church fishing dispute:

> The DFO used its power to stop the native fishers by force if necessary, and Natives showed power by resisting authority. The non-Natives fishers also showed their power when they destroyed Native fishing equipment.

Tim commented on the notion of power in the Oka crisis:

> The Mohawks believed that the "white men" would not listen to them unless they used violent means such as their blockade.

Alex wrote about the notion of fairness in the Burnt Church fishing dispute:

> Native idea of fairness—Treaty says they can fish so they feel they have the right.
>
> Non-Native idea of fairness—They feel that the Native peoples should not have special rights and should have to follow all the regulations.

Kathleen reflected about equality in the Burnt Church case study:

> The non-Native fishermen may be angry not just because the Aboriginal peoples are fishing, but because they have special laws which they benefit

from, and which the non-natives do not.

It is evident in these comments that we see students actually engaged in the process of working through the different perspectives of concepts generally considered to be universal in application. Certainly, this is a skill that stands to benefit a responsible citizen. Students also considered other factors, such as race, social class and gender when analyzing the issues. Roland reflected on the Burnt Church dispute:

> The greater good or social conscience here really doesn't point in any direction. This is because the fishermen of the Atlantic regions are some of the poorest by economic bracket in Canada. Although the Natives of the region are on average poorer. This is taking employment from one group of poor and giving it to another.

As a result of these added dimensions, the issues often took on several possibilities for discussion. The use of the medicine wheel helped to enrich the issues for students by providing opportunities for in-depth analysis of the issues. This holistic or well-rounded approach to issue analysis is both responsible and crucial in Social Studies education.

ADDRESSING WHITE GUILT AND RESISTENCE

When dealing with a large number of research participants, it is expected that the variety and number of unknowns will increase. In this study, those students who resisted any change to their previous understandings of Aboriginal people, culture and issues were few in number; however, the challenge remains as to how to address these individuals in the midst of a study. It is hoped that there will be some latent understandings for these individuals. This will develop when they are ready to accept

them. Yet, how should these resistances be handled during the course of the study? It is critical that from the beginning of the study it is made clear to students that there is an open atmosphere for discussion of the issues. I was in a favourable position having had the opportunity of working with my own classes with an already established rapport between us. Thus, an open and accepting classroom environment was evident prior to the commencement of the study. No voices were intentionally silenced. Students were encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions, as these new comments and questions lead us to new possibilities and understandings. Most students felt comfortable contributing to discussions. I do not believe this to have been an impediment in this study, since an overwhelming number of students responded in their questionnaires that they felt class discussions were very open, encouraging and positive. Yet, it remains important to ensure that the voices of others are heard. Adele wrote the following about the discussions we had:

> The nature of the class has been strongly for Natives and not considering other points of view without being shut down.

In contrast, Dana wrote:

> I don't feel like this class is very open-minded about Aboriginal people and that frustrates me.

Both of these students shared a similar feeling about class discussions. However, Adele felt that she was not heard because her opinions differed from that of the vocal majority, while Dana was frustrated that the entire class did not all come to share the same positive view about Aboriginal people as she did. These comments reflect the complex nature of class discussions, whereby a student's voice and identity are

intertwined. It is crucial that all voices are heard and respected so that all students share a positive learning experience.

LIMITATIONS AND POSITIVES OF BEING A TEACHER/RESEARCHER

Certainly my ability as a teacher to build trust and rapport with and between students has only benefited the study. It has allowed for the development of a safe and caring environment over a period of time and created possibilities for development of long term goals, such as social justice and anti-racism. However, this same rapport that has been established between the teacher/researcher and participants can also lead to risks in the validity of student responses. Students, wishing to please the "teacher" may tell the "researcher" what it is they think he/she wants to hear. There is no way of knowing absolutely. Moreover, as a teacher/researcher, I was actively involved in shaping the study, contributing to its depth and richness, but at the same time I had to ask myself: At what point and how do I step away from the study for greater perspective? These were challenging aspects of my research. I believe that my active engagement in the study helped contribute to its successes, however, at the same time, it presents the dilemma as to how much of this qualitative study can be generalized and replicated.

IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has opened many new challenges and possibilities for new cycles in this critical action research project. I am interested in doing a similar critical action research project that would be more inclusive by expanding the number of

participants to include those in non-academic classes as well. Furthermore, the study would benefit by being more collaborative in nature. By further embracing the emancipatory goals of the study, I would like to integrate the authentic voices of Aboriginal students, either from within the school, or as a collaborative project with a group of Aboriginal students from another interested school. In addition, the involvement of Elders and interested members from the local Aboriginal community in the Social Studies classroom could help to bring issues closer to home for the student participants and perhaps help to extend their sense of agency. More direct and immediate connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students will help to bring students together to challenge stereotypes and bridge lacks in understandings. Certainly critical action research, with its participatory and "democratic" aims would be richer by speaking *with* Aboriginal people, rather than *about* them.

FINAL COMMENTS

In light of increasing globalization and the continued threats to the existence of the unique status and way of life of Aboriginal people, critical pedagogy, as a background for addressing their concerns is particularly relevant. Raising the awareness of non-Aboriginal students to the issues facing our Aboriginal people is necessary if critical educators wish to move students towards active social justice. Colonial and post-colonial devaluation of Aboriginal cultures and ways of life, systemic racism, dangerous stereotypes and struggles for political recognition are issues to be dealt with in critical social studies classrooms. The collective voice of

Aboriginal people can be used effectively to draw awareness to the specific political and social aims, such as treaty rights, self-government and Aboriginal peoples well being. My study provides insight into the possibilities of integrating anti-racism education with a holistic methodology for addressing culturally sensitive issues affecting Aboriginal communities in the Social Studies 10 classroom. It also reflects the need for greater awareness of and the historical significance of colonialism and its impact on the contemporary issues affecting Aboriginal people.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Dear Student,

I am writing this letter to seek your permission to participate in an action research project occurring in your social studies 10 class that will explore the use of a holistic methodology for learning about Canada's First Nations people, culture and issues. The portion of the study that involves you will commence in October and will be completed by December, 2002. I am conducting this research as part of my Master's program at the University of Alberta.

Your commitment will involve questionnaires, reflective writing exercises and eight students will be involved in thirty minute audiotaped interviews to discuss their impressions of the use of the holistic methodology in understanding and appreciating First Nations people and culture. Audiotapes of student dialogue in discussion groups of those students who agree to participate in the research will be taken and observational field notes and transcripts will be made from the audiotapes.

You are not required to take part in this research project and may opt out at any time. The topics discussed are taken from the grade ten social studies curriculum and therefore if you wish to withdraw from the study, you can be assured that your performance evaluation will be in no way impacted by your choice to not participate in the research project. Your assignments and contributions to class will not be used in the research study. Furthermore, your name and identity will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Your identity as a participant will be known only to me. I will assign you a pseudonym (false name) to use in my research.

After the completion of my study, my findings will become part of my Master's thesis, and may also be used in the writing of articles or presentations for the purpose of informing other educators.

I hope that you will participate in this study. Your contribution will be valuable to me and to other educators.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the consent form and return it as soon as possible. You will not become involved in this study until a consent form is returned.

Thank you for your participation in this study,

Ms. Ament Sperling

APPENDIX B

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I _____, hereby agree to participate in the study (or portion thereof) conducted by my Social Studies 10 teacher, Corinne Ament Sperling.

Please check off the portions of the study in that you agree to participate:

- ☐ Questionnaire
- ☐ Reflective writing exercises
- ☐ Audio taped class discussion
- ☐ Interview

I understand that:

- I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or without affecting my standing or relationship with my teacher, my peers, or with the University of Alberta
- all documentation that identifies me in any manner will be treated confidentially and will be destroyed upon completion of the study, and that my participation will be completed by the end of June, 2003.
- I will not be identifiable in any documents resulting form this research

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- research thesis
- presentations and written articles for other educators

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO PARENTS / GUARDIANS

Dear Parents or Guardians,

I am writing this letter to seek your permission to involve your son/daughter in an action research project occurring in their social studies 10 class that will explore the use of a holistic methodology for learning about Canada's First Nations people, culture and issues. The portion of the study that involves your child will commence in October and will be completed by December, 2002. I am conducting this research as part of my Master's program at the University of Alberta.

The commitment on the part of your child will involve questionnaires and reflective writing exercises relating to appreciating First Nations culture and people. Your son or daughter may also be asked to participate in a thirty minute audiotaped interview to discuss their impressions of the use of the holistic methodology in understanding and appreciating First Nations people and culture. I will also be audiotaping students in class. The groups audiotaped will consist of those students who have permission to participate in the research. Other students discussions will not be audiotaped. I will make observational class notes.

Students are not required to take part in this research project and may opt out at any time. The topics discussed are taken from the grade ten social studies curriculum and therefore any student who wishes to withdraw from the study can be assured that their performance evaluation will be in no way impacted by their choice to not participate in the research project. Their assignments and contributions to class will not be used in the research study. Furthermore, your child's name and identity will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Your child's identity as a participant will be known only to me. I will use pseudonyms in all discussions and write-ups of the research.

After the completion of my study, my findings will become part of my Master's thesis, and may also be used in the writing of articles or presentations for the purpose of informing other educators.

I hope that your child will participate in this study. Your child's contribution will be valuable to me and to other educators.

If you and your child agree in his/her participation in this study, please sign the consent form and return it as soon as possible. Your child will not become involved in this study until a consent form is returned.

Thank you so much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Corinne Ament Sperling

For further information, please contact Corinne Ament Sperling at
mail at cament or Dr. Ingrid Johnston (Supervisor) a
mail at

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORMS TO PARENTS / GUARDIANS

I _____, parent or guardian of _____, hereby grant permission for my son/daughter to participate in the study (or portion thereof) conducted by their Social Studies 10 teacher, Corinne Ament Sperling.

Please check off the portions of the study in that you give your son or daughter permission to participate:

- ☐ Questionnaire
- ☐ Reflective writing exercises
- ☐ Audio taped class discussion
- ☐ Interview

I understand that:

- My child can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting his or her standing or relationship with the teacher, peers, or with the University of Alberta
- all documentation that identifies my child in any manner will be destroyed upon completion of the study, and that my child's participation will be completed by the end of June, 2003

I also understand that the results of this research will be used only in the following:

- research thesis
- presentations and written articles for other educators.

_____ _____

Signature of Parent / Guardian Date

APPENDIX E

QUESTIONNAIRE

The Medicine wheel helped me to better understand the issues affecting Aboriginal people in Canada. (Circle one).

1: strongly agree 2: agree 3: neutral 4: disagree 5: strongly disagree

Explain:

_____
_____
_____
_____

List up to five ways that the medicine wheel helped you to challenge stereotypes of Aboriginal people.

_____
_____
_____
_____

What I liked best about the medicine wheel was:

_____
_____
_____

What I liked least about the medicine wheel was:

_____
_____
_____

List five changes in your understanding of the issues affecting Aboriginal people.

_____
_____
_____
_____

I feel that I am more / less / neutral (circle one) sympathetic to Aboriginal peoples' concerns.

Explain:

_____

_____

_____

I feel that the issues of self-government, fishing rights, treaties and land claims will be of great / little / no importance (circle one) in our country in the future. I would say that my understanding of these issues is superior / very good/ good / fair / poor (circle one) compared to that of most Canadian citizens.

The medicine wheel helped me to become a critical thinker.

1: strongly agree 2: agree 3: neutral 4: disagree 5: strongly disagree

Explain:

_____

_____

_____

The most pressing concern facing Aboriginal people in my opinion is

_____

Explain:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Has the holistic (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual) nature of the medicine wheel helped you to better appreciate Aboriginal perspectives and learning styles? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Has the medicine wheel helped to open up class discussions (that is, students felt free to express their opinions in class) about controversial / sensitive issues affecting Aboriginal people? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Overall, I feel a more positive / negative / neutral (circle one) view about Aboriginal people than I did before.

Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Of all of the things we studied in this unit, _____ stayed with me the most.

Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Brainstorm everything you would like to share about your feelings of Aboriginal people, cultures and issues:

APPENDIX F

MEDICINE WHEEL